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SEA-TOLL
OF OUR TIME

The sea has no generosity. No display of manly qualities—courage, hardihood, endurance, faithfulness—has ever been known to touch its irresponsible consciousness of power. The ocean has the conscienceless temper of a savage autocrat spoiled by much adulation. He cannot brook the slightest appearance of defiance, and has remained the irreconcilable enemy of ships and men ever since ships and men had the unheard-of audacity to go afloat together in the face of his frown. From that day he has gone on swallowing up fleets and men without his resentment being glutted by the number of victims—by so many wrecked ships and wrecked lives. To-day, as ever, he is ready to beguile and betray, to smash and to drown the incorrigible optimism of men who, backed by the fidelity of ships, are trying to wrest from him the fortune of their house, the dominion of their world, or only a dole of food for their hunger. If not always in the hot mood to smash, he is always stealthily ready for a drowning. The most amazing wonder of the deep is its unfathomable cruelty.

—CONRAD



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GETTING OUT THE LIFEBOATS OF THE VESTRIS

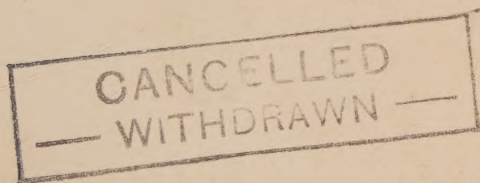
(Frontispiece)

(See page 214)

SEA-TOLL OF OUR TIME

*A CHRONICLE OF MARITIME DISASTER
DURING THE LAST THIRTY YEARS
DRAWN FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES*

By
R. L. HADFIELD



H. F. & G. WITHERBY
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CHAPTER I

THE WRECK OF THE *ADEN*

Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Co.'s

Intermediate Steamer

2,517 tons nett Register

Built, Middlesborough, 1892

Ashore East side of Island of Sokotra

3 a.m. Wednesday, June 9th, 1897

*Captain, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th officers and 25
passengers lost. Lascars and other seamen, 18*

The P. & O. liner *Aden* left Yokohama, homeward bound, in May, 1897, having aboard thirty-four passengers, a crew of fifty-one—composed chiefly of Lascars—and four officers under Captain Hill, an experienced navigator.

From Yokohama to Colombo nothing of an untoward nature happened; there was every promise of a happy and secure voyage, and nothing to give qualms to the most nervous sea-passenger. But the very day after leaving Ceylon the monsoon broke, and a very different state of affairs was quickly brought about. In place of the blue skies and gently rolling waves appeared dark, lowering clouds and a quickly rising sea. Violent squalls accompanied by blinding rain swooped down upon the *Aden*, and those of the passengers who could remain on deck saw nothing around them but the stormy waste in which sky and wave seemed to be mingled together in a forbidding scene of desolation.

Day by day the fury of the storm increased ; the passengers in their airless cabins, every porthole being closed, suffered greatly from sea-sickness and from depression caused by the knowledge that there were over two thousand miles of sea to be traversed before the ship would again come to port, and continually the wind blew without relaxation, and the clouds scudded by, allowing through them no glimpse of the cheering sun.

The officers were indefatigable in their efforts for the comfort and encouragement of those in their care, and Captain Hill himself went below whenever he could tear himself away from the bridge to assure the ladies and children that conditions would soon be better, telling them that they would soon be running into smoother water on the north side of the Island of Sokotra, where they would be protected from the extreme violence of the monsoon.

"Would to God that it could have been so," said a survivor, "and that the morning of the 9th of June might have seen us still sound and running on safely homeward, instead of lying, a dismantled wreck, on that fearful reef off Sokotra."

But conditions did not improve. On the 7th the sea was worse than ever, and the unhappy *Aden* was rolling so heavily as to dip the scuppers of her upper hurricane-deck in the sea. It had become clear to all, in spite of the assumed cheerfulness of the officers, that she was in grave peril. Nor was this the worst. Terrifying as was the rolling of the ship—so fearful that at times it seemed impossible that she could right herself—violent as was the wrath of the seas as they flung themselves in a long succession of giant blows at her, there was, as the officers and many of the male passengers knew, a greater menace to come. That menace was land.

They were now approaching a point that has

ever been a deadly peril to shipping, the island of Sokotra, which, for all that it could shelter ships from the full violence of storm, had brought many to destruction.

Land! To the women aboard the *Aden* it may have seemed a blessed word. To the officers at all events it proved an additional source of anxiety. Sokotra was no haven of refuge to the labouring ship, no landfall to cheer the hearts of men fighting for their lives with the elements.

At the time of the wreck of the *Aden* Sokotra was described as follows: "Within the jurisdiction of Britain, but having no British resident nor missionary work; slavery exists, and the wreck of a German ship lies off Ras Momi as a silent witness to the absence of lights round this dangerous coast, though in the direct track between Aden and India."

Matters were now approaching a crisis in the *Aden*. On the night of the 8th, as her rolling was so fearful and water had entered the cabins on the starboard side, many ladies took their mattresses into the saloon, giving it the appearance of a camp hospital. The men in the meantime wandered listlessly about the vessel, many filled with premonition of calamity to come, none of them able to sleep.

The crisis came in the darkest hours of the night, and suddenly, without warning. There was no cry from the look-outs, since they could see but a few yards ahead through the darkness that seemed all sea and spray; there was no running about of seamen or dash of officers to the bridge. At 3 a.m. the ship struck.

One moment there was the rolling and pitching of the unhappy vessel, the steady thump and vibration of her engines, the next a grinding crash, a sudden, terrifying stillness, to be followed by uproar more violent than ever as sea after sea began to crash

down upon the decks of the now motionless ship.

"Suddenly," ran a survivor's story, "I felt four violent bumps from forward of the ship, louder and more fearful than any hitherto caused by the buffets of the sea, followed by a horrid grinding noise apparently from beneath where I stood. Immediately afterwards I heard the officers above cry out, 'All passengers on deck! Bring your lifebelts!' Knowing then that my worst fears were justified, that the ship had struck, I ran to the saloon for my wife and child. The scene there was indescribable. Ladies and children, still clad in their night-clothes, were struggling, pushing, and fighting for the stairway. In the midst of this the electric lights went out, leaving the saloon full of horror. They were frantic in their efforts to reach the decks, causing an awful crush on the stairway; the screams of women and children were heart-rending."

Eventually, through the efforts of the officers, all the passengers were mustered on the starboard side of the upper deck. Though this was on the lee, it was unprotected from the wind, and sheets of spray continually dashed, funnel-high, over the vessel. The night was hideously dark; it was "only from the imploring cries on all sides that one could get any idea of those around"; the cold was intense, though the stewards brought up wraps and blankets with which the half-clothed passengers covered themselves.

When dawn came at last, preparations were made for lowering the boats, and there took place those scenes which are unfortunately only too often connected with shipwreck. Those on the port side had been carried away, leaving three on the lee. The after-boat was lowered first, but as soon as she met the water, which still raged and hissed about the *Aden's* sides, she was torn from the tackle. Mr

Carden, the chief officer, in an heroic attempt to retrieve her, leapt with a life-line into the sea, but was immediately engulfed and was seen no more.

Then a cutter was lowered, and Mr. Miller, the 2nd officer, with twelve of the crew, made another attempt to save the first boat. But they could not reach her, nor could they regain the *Aden's* side. The cutter was driven away to leeward and vanished in the mist of rain and foam.

There was now but one boat left. She was taken in hand by the 3rd and 4th officers, but whilst being lowered broke away from the after tackle and, hanging down from the fore tackle, precipitated four of the crew, a stewardess, and all her stores into the water. Again an unhappy incident brought forth its attendant heroism. Without a second's hesitation, Mr. Hurlston, the 4th officer, leapt into the sea and, being a powerful and resolute swimmer, succeeded in saving the drowning stewardess.

The boat was then successfully launched. Several ladies and children were placed in it, leaving seventeen passengers behind, many ladies refusing to take a place in the boat on hearing that their husbands could not accompany them.

It was a mile to land—a mile of water lashed to fury, a maelstrom of foam—and as those left on the wind-swept decks of the *Aden* watched the efforts of the crew to combat the waves, they knew that the plight of those in the boat was if anything more terrible than their own. No longer in the shelter of the wreck, the lifeboat stood little chance of living in such a sea.

Even as the band of sufferers upon the deck watched, the crew of the lifeboat gave up the struggle; the boat scudded away before the wind and was soon lost to sight in sheets of rain and spray. She and those in her were never seen nor heard of again.

The position of the survivors on board was a terrible one ; though the *Aden* was now comparatively steady, no longer rolling and only lurching occasionally as some more than usually great wave struck her, she was being swept from end to end. Held for the moment by the fangs of rock that had pierced her bottom, she could not rise to the smallest wave, was at the mercy of them all, as, mounting above her, they crashed down and poured their hundreds of tons of water in a pitiless stream along her decks.

To hold on in such conditions was a matter requiring almost superhuman strength, and the passengers were forced to see their numbers slowly diminish as one by one the hungry waves took toll of them.

"Poor Mrs. S——!" said Mr. Gillet, a survivor. "Her husband and child had been swept away to sea ; then she too was torn from the rail she gripped by another green monster and hurled along the deck with fearful violence. The sea, stripping all covering from her, left her lying unclothed on the deck, her broken limbs rising and falling as each wave surged over her. She must have been unconscious, thank God !"

Later, Mr. Gillet himself, whilst holding Jeannie, the two year-old daughter of Mrs. S——, was swept from his shelter and dashed against a rail, there to be met by another sea from the weather side which cast him down on the deck near a spot where the side was broken and tore the child from his grasp. Wounded and bleeding, he lay, not caring if another wave came to carry him into the sea, only anxious to keep his eyes to the last upon his wife and child. But Mrs. Gillet, missing her husband, suddenly caught sight of him and the child lying in this exposed and perilous spot. Rushing out on to the open deck, where every moment great rushes of water threatened to engulf her, she placed her arms about her husband

and implored him to make one more effort. "At last I managed to crawl to my knees," he said, "rescue Jeannie and regain shelter, thanks to the heroic conduct of my wife."

It is sad to have to relate that a later wave tore the little girl from her protector's arms and carried her away to join her parents in death.

All the officers save Captain Hill had gone. It was now his turn. Whilst moving about to see if any of the passengers could be made more secure he was caught by two waves. The first flung him down and broke both his legs, the second swept him overboard, and he too was lost for ever.

One by one the survivors went, until there were but nine left, clinging to the sea-swept wreck, fearful that at any moment she would break up and plunge all to their deaths, but hoping, always hoping that soon the fury of the storm might abate.

The 10th and 11th were spent in this terrible condition. But on the 12th the nine survivors of the passengers felt with joy that the wind was blowing with less severity. Waves now washed with less frequency over them, and a little later it was possible to move with some security upon the decks. They were worn out with fatigue, cold, drenched, hungry, bitterly thirsty, but even now that it was safer to venture could barely exert themselves to explore the wreck in search of food. At length, daring to go below, they found one or two cabins fairly free of water and there they installed themselves, finding, to their great relief, a store of Barcelona nuts on which they fed ravenously, and—what cheered the men even more—a few pounds of tobacco.

It was now possible to look round and inquire what had happened to the crew. Of the Lascars and other Easterns there remained thirty-three in the fore-castle, all of whom behaved throughout in an ex-

emplary manner, sharing matches and other hoarded treasures with the passengers.

On the 13th and 14th ships passed them, but in spite of all the signals that the weary sufferers could make, kept on their way, apparently not observing life on the battered hulk.

But in the meantime fears as to the safety of the *Aden* had been expressed in London, and the P. & O. directors, hearing that a wreck had been seen on Sokotra, cabled to Aden asking that a search should be made. The result of this search was that on the 26th, after spending no less than seventeen days on the wreck, the survivors saw the Royal Indian Marine steamship *Mayo* bearing down towards them.

The nine remaining passengers were first taken off, the Lascars making no attempt to rush the rescuing boats out of their turn, and all were taken to Aden, where they received the attention their sufferings necessitated.

Expeditions were later sent to search the whole of Sokotra and the islands of the Laccadive group, but no other survivors, nor traces of them, were ever discovered.

The Court of Enquiry upon the disaster was unable to come to any definite conclusion as to its cause, but suggested that the abnormal weather had affected local currents, thus bringing the *Aden* far nearer Sokotra than Captain Hill's reckonings had caused him to think her to be.

CHAPTER II

THE SINKING OF THE *BOURGOGNE*

Steamer belonging to Compagnie Générale Transatlantique

7,395 tons gross Register

Built 1885, La Seyne.

*In collision with barque "Cromartyshire" 60 miles
South of Sable Island, Nova Scotia*

5 a.m. July 4th, 1898

Captain, officers, 447 passengers, 118 crew lost

Collisions in fog have been the cause of many tragedies of the sea; few sailormen will deny that they prefer the known perils of hurricane to the blind game of dodging death when fog comes down on the surface of the deep and blinds and deafens the anxious look-outs.

Fog has been the cause of even greater disasters than the sinking of the *Bourgogne*, but in this sad affair there is one special point of interest, this being the fact that a three-masted sailing vessel, a barque, holed and sank a trans-Atlantic liner five times her size, an occurrence which caused the greatest astonishment both to the participants in the affair at the time and later to the sea-faring world in general.

The barque *Cromartyshire*, 1554 tons, Captain Henderson, from Dunkirk to Philadelphia with chalk, was groping her way slowly through a dense fog which covered a wide area south of Sable Island. It was five o'clock in the morning of July 4th, 1898;

she was making about four knots, sounding her horn, her officers and look-out men peering anxiously ahead. Their anxiety was increased beyond what would be normally felt in such circumstances by the fact that they had heard for some minutes the boom of another syren. This had actually been first heard by Mrs. H. Henderson, who with her two children was accompanying the captain on the voyage. She had called the attention of her husband to the sound, and a moment later the mate had heard it also.

The *Cromartysshire* moved on, surrounded by a wall of fog through which it was impossible to see for more than twenty yards. The look-out men in the bows, if they glanced back, could see her forecourse, but her topsails were invisible in the gloom. The officers rubbed their eyes, praying for a lift in the fog; the look-outs peered forward, striving desperately to pick out the vessel that they knew was coming so dangerously close.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Henderson had taken up her position near her cabin in order to rescue the children in case of disaster, and hardly had she done so than the strange vessel was upon them.

Suddenly the huge bulk of a steamer loomed into view, black against the fog, massive, terrifying. All aboard the *Cromartysshire* gave one concerted yell—a yell that was drowned immediately in the terrific crash that seemed to follow instantly upon the appearance of the steamer.

The barque's bows hit the steamer amidship. Down came her foretopmast and maintopgallantmast, bringing down the yards and all attached to them in inextricable confusion, whilst the bows crumpled into a shapeless mass of plates, and the sea began to pour in.

For a few seconds the two vessels ground one against the other; then, carried by the way on her,

the steamer scraped along the whole port side of the barque and vanished again into the fog, her syren booming out long mournful blasts—signals of disaster.

For the first few moments after the collision, none aboard the barque thought she could stay afloat more than a minute or so. But a rapid examination proved that she was in no immediate danger, being kept afloat by her collision bulkhead. The barque was in a parlous condition, but safe enough for the present.

What of the steamer? All hands now thought of her. They could still hear her syren, and the flash of rockets was seen dimly through the fog, which now began to lift slightly. Captain Henderson answered with rockets, thinking that the steamer was offering help. But suddenly the syren ceased its mournful cry, no further rockets could be observed, and a silence fell on the sea. Then the company of the *Cromartyshire* realised the awful result of the collision. It was the steamer that had suffered, and in the short time that had elapsed since the crash of impact she had gone down.

Then, as if satisfied with the work it had done, the fog lifted, and half an hour after the steamer's syren had first been heard the sea was clear, and the pitiful consequences of the smash could be seen. First two boats were observed. They were signalled to come alongside, and soon there stood on the deck of the barque two boat-loads of the crew of the *Bourgogne*, a steamer of 7,395 tons, belonging to the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, bound from New York to Havre, under Captain Deloncle.

A quantity of wreckage was floating about. To this other survivors could be seen clinging, and steps were immediately taken towards their rescue. Again and again the boats of the *Cromartyshire* went out to return with survivors, many of whom were

found clinging desperately to rafts without oars. The men of the barque and the survivors of the *Bourgogne* worked indefatigably. Thirty tons of cargo were jettisoned to lighten the vessel, and eventually 200 survivors of the collision were picked up.

Meanwhile, the steamer *Grecian*, of the Allan Line, had appeared on the scene. Coming to the aid of the *Cromartyshire*, she took her in tow to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Now it was possible to realise the full gravity of the affair. There were lost in the *Bourgogne* 88 first-class passengers, 113 second, 246 steerage, and 118 members of the crew—a terrible death-roll considering that there was no high sea running at the time and that boats had been successfully launched; and from the whole world rose cries of amazement and horror at the appalling list of the dead. Felix Faure, President of the French, was the recipient on behalf of the sufferers of the disaster and relatives of the drowned of messages of sympathy from Queen Victoria, the Tsar, the Kaiser, and representatives of other nations throughout the world.

But amidst the general hubbub and discussion which a great disaster of this kind inevitably rouses, there slowly arose with terrible insistence other things of a very sinister character. From Halifax ghastly stories began to spread far and wide. As the survivors recovered from the shock of their experience and became once more articulate, they began to pour into the ears of press reporters tales that added to the general horror at the disaster. The circumstances of the sinking of the *Bourgogne*, they said, had been of a shameful character; the passengers had been sacrificed; the crew had behaved like despicable cowards; there was even talk of indicting the surviving members for murder. The presses of the world began to hum with tales of infamy.

The *Cromartysaire*, it appeared, had struck the *Bourgogne* amidships, her jib-boom actually raking the steamer's bridge and injuring her master, Captain Deloncle. Though water began to pour in, the captain did not appear to be unduly alarmed, for he assured the passengers near him that he could reach Sable Island, and at first there was no sign of panic. But hope of beaching the vessel was short-lived, for only a few minutes after the captain had made his reassuring statement it became clear to all aboard that the vessel was sinking fast.

Then, said the surviving passengers, hell broke loose. The crew instantly made for the boats, thrusting the screaming passengers aside, deaf to their entreaties, lost to all sense of shame, fighting madly for their own lives and manning the boats only for their own safety. Knives were drawn, women and children were trampled underfoot, and many were dragged down to their deaths by the sinking ship with their hands grasping each other's throats.

A survivor, Charles Duttweiler, said, for instance, that, having jumped into the sea, he was carried down by the sinking ship. Struggling to the surface he swam about for about half an hour, and then seeing a boat, tried to enter her. He was roughly thrust away with a boat-hook, being repeatedly jabbed as he fought for a hold, and receiving a wound in the eye. He saw women pushed away with oars to drown helplessly whilst the men in the boats saved themselves.

Another, Gustav Grimaux, saw no attempt to get out any boats save those the crew needed for themselves. Others told of life-lines of boats hacked away when women clung to them, though their weight in no way imperilled the safety of the boats. Scores of similar stories were told, to flash round the

world and rouse from every quarter a cry of execration against the crew of the *Bourgogne*.

Examination of the list of survivors seemed to bear out all these accusations, for of the women and children aboard the *Bourgogne* only one woman was saved, the wife of Professor Lacasse. She had been saved entirely through the efforts of her husband. The only passenger on deck at the time of the impact, he had immediately rushed below to fetch his wife ; they had leapt overboard together, and had remained in the sea eight hours before being picked up. And there was the calm but apparently damning statement of Captain Henderson, who said that the first two boats to reach his ship contained only seamen, *who were quite dry*.

However, it does not need much imagination to realise that the state of mind of passengers suddenly plunged into the scenes of horror which must attend all such accidents of the sea as this is not conducive of calm observation, and that mistakes, exaggeration, and even possibly hallucination must occur.

After the first rush of accusations against the crew of the *Bourgogne*, calmer voices began to be heard, and a somewhat different complexion was put on things. Mdme. Lacasse, for instance, said that she saw no disgraceful conduct on the part of the crew, but that the trouble was caused by steerage passengers—Italians, Hungarians, and others—who fought with the ferocity of cornered beasts both with the crew and their companions to get to the boats. Another survivor said that the crew did not save themselves at the expense of others until actually in the water, adding that a number of lives were lost through the upsetting of the boats after they had been launched by their being sucked down in the whirlpool caused by the sinking of the steamer, and also by the falling of the funnel, which crashed down on a boat-load

of women, killing them all. These statements were backed up by the French Consul-General in New York, who examined survivors and could not find that the officers and crew did other than their duty.

On July 28th an enquiry into the accident was held at Halifax by Captain Smith, Wreck Commissioner, under orders from the Dominion Government, and though this enquiry did not, to use the court's own words, "decide how the *Bourgogne* finally disappeared and what were the causes by which there was such a melancholy loss of life", it did bring out the fact that the *Bourgogne* was 160 miles north of the track which trans-Atlantic liners had agreed to follow on East-bound voyages. It exonerated Captain Henderson from all blame and complimented him on his behaviour throughout, adding that had Captain Deloncle adhered to the route for steamships generally agreed upon, the accident would not have happened.

In June of the following year, however, a civil tribunal sitting in Paris, in an action for damages brought by the widow of an hotel-keeper of New York against the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, dismissed the allegations respecting the route chosen by Captain Deloncle and the speed of the *Bourgogne*, also regarding the mismanagement in fitting up the vessel and the working of the boats. No blame, said the court, was to be cast on Captain Deloncle for the behaviour of the crew and passengers. The crew shewed promptitude in endeavouring to save life, and whatever shortcomings there were could only be laid to the charge of the foreigners. But, added the court, Captain Deloncle was inexcusably wrong in trying to reach Sable Island when four of the water-tight compartments had been smashed in and the vessel was sinking. On his assurance

that he could do so, the passengers had not put on lifebelts, and the delay in measures for saving life had disastrous effects.

Captain Deloncle, however, had paid for his fault with his life. He went down with his ship.

CHAPTER III

THE STRANDING OF THE *MOHEGAN*

Atlantic Transport Company's Liner

4,500 tons nett Register

Built 1896

Wrecked on the Manacles

6 p.m., Oct. 13th, 1898

Captain Griffith and 106 lost

The Manacles are a ledge of rocks running out into the sea from Manacle Point, Cornwall, some seven miles almost due south of Falmouth. In the past they have earned for themselves a most sinister reputation; their jagged teeth have torn the bottoms out of many stout ships, and no master who has no need to be in their neighbourhood but lays a course well to the southward, twelve miles being the allowance usually given.

But on the evening of October 13th, 1898, watchers on the shore at Porthoustock, near Manacle Point, saw a strange sight—nothing less than the lights of a large ship which appeared to be close within shore and moving at full speed. One of these watchers happened to be Coxswain Hill of the Porthoustock lifeboat, who was standing at his stable door looking out to sea, and even he for a moment was puzzled.

At first he could hardly believe that the vessel was so close, thinking that the lights must be those of a larger vessel some distance away, for to all appearances the ship was making straight for the

shore, as if her master intended to beach her in Porthoustock Bay.

The lifeboatman saw only too clearly the peril which faced the ship, and broke into a run towards the Porthoustock lifeboat station to order the maroons to be fired and prepare the boat. If the ship, whoever she was, did not change course within a few moments, she must strike on the intervening Manacles. The lifeboat would be needed.

Hardly had Hill reached the station than the steamer struck. Instantly waves began to break over her, the lights went out, a couple of rockets soared aloft, and then all was darkness. The drama of shipwreck had happened within the space of a few minutes, with a terrible inevitability made all the more intense by the impotence of those who watched from the shore.

The vessel was the *Mohegan*, a steamer of 4,500 tons nett register, belonging to the Atlantic Transport Line, under the command of the company's commodore, Captain Griffith, who had been in their employ for twelve years. She was on her second voyage only, bound from London to New York, and should not have been in the neighbourhood of the Manacles at any time. Moving at about thirteen knots, she had passed to the shoreward side of the bell-buoy which marked the extremity of the Manacles, and had struck Maen Voces rock in the Varsis ledge.

The moment she grounded it was clear that she was doomed. The rocks had torn the bottom out of her; the sea rushed in, and, buffeted by the waves, she swayed terribly on the ledge. Orders were immediately passed for the launching of the boats. This, however, presented very great difficulty. The *Mohegan* was down by the bows and listing severely; her dynamos had been washed out; she was in unfathomable darkness, her lamp locker,

which was in the head, was awash and could not be reached, and the lurching of the vessel on the rocks and the seas which broke over her added to the almost superhuman labour of the task.

Nevertheless, two of the six steel lifeboats were successfully launched and got away from the ship. They were only just in time, for almost immediately after they had left her side she plunged from the ledge and went down bow first, only her funnel and masts shewing above the surface.

Meanwhile the lifeboat was experiencing great difficulty in the work of rescue, for it was impossible to see the *Mohegan*. Even before she went down she was shewing no lights at all through the flooding out of the dynamos. Had it been possible for the lamp room to be reached, oil lamps might have been used by her crew to indicate their position, or had there been an oil mast-head lamp, this might have sufficed to guide the lifeboat to her. But as it was, the rescuers were forced to grope about in a rough sea whilst precious minutes were being lost.

There was, of course, no thought of putting back without making the most strenuous efforts at saving some at least of the crew and passengers of the liner, and soon the lifeboatmen were rewarded by seeing close at hand what at first was thought to be a large piece of wreckage. This proved to be one of the boats which had got away from the *Mohegan*, but it was floating bottom up.

Running alongside, the lifeboatmen found two men clinging to the upturned keel. These were rescued. Cries from beneath the boat were then heard, and after great exertions the lifeboatmen succeeded in righting it. There they found amid the dead two living women. One of these, a Miss Compton Smith, told her story at the subsequent enquiry in words which from their very calmness conveyed in a

way no rhetoric could have done the terror of her experience.

"A wave with tremendous force turned the boat over," she said. "On putting my hands up I felt the boat above me, and imagined that I had been dragged back underneath the wreck. When, however, I realised that I was under the boat, my first thought was that if I could dive I could come up in the open sea and should have more chance, because I could not breathe where I was. My foot, however, was fastened between the seat and part of the boat, and I was therefore compelled to stay where I was. A half-dead woman was clinging to me, and there was a little child also under the boat, who called for some time; but it was silent after a while. There was also a man, but his voice ceased too, and at last the only persons left under the boat were myself and Mrs. Rondebush. Suddenly I felt a great jerk, and thought the last had come, but the boat was turned over, and I saw the lifeboat and the light and the men standing over. At first they could not extricate me, but at last with the aid of an axe I was got free."

Having rescued the two women, the lifeboat searched further, burning flares, and eventually, guided by cries, came upon the other boat. This had remained right side up, and with twenty-six survivors the lifeboat now made for land. On the way a further rescue was achieved, a Miss Noble being seen clinging to a piece of wreckage. The fortitude of this lady was remarked upon by all who witnessed her rescue. She hailed the lifeboat, asking for a rope to be thrown her, and, clambering aboard, sat down on a thwart as composedly as if she had but stopped a passing bus to take her on a shopping expedition.

No sooner were these survivors landed than the

lifeboat went out again. This time cries from the direction of the Maen Voces rock were heard, and the wreck was located. It was impossible to approach right up to her on account of the danger of being stove in on the rocks, and anchor was let go at some little distance, whilst a plan for rescuing those who could be seen clinging to the rigging was worked out.

The lifeboat had been seen by the latter, and now there arose one of those opportunities for heroism and fortitude which are so often to be met with in the history of shipwreck. Quarter-master Juddery determined to make connection with the lifeboat. At risk of being engulfed by the waves or dashed against pinnacles of rock, he plunged into the sea and struck out for the lifeboat. He was a strong swimmer, and soon a cheer announced to his companions still clinging to their perilous hold in the *Mohegan's* rigging that he had reached his objective. None could have blamed him for considering that he had done enough. By his own exertions he had saved himself. But, having been given some brandy, Juddery essayed the return journey with a line. He returned safely to the wreck, and communication thus established, sixteen souls, including a stewardess, were dragged through the waves to safety.

Meanwhile, on shore, attempts had been made to reach the *Mohegan*, which could be seen from the cliff, with the rocket apparatus. She was, however, too far out; the rockets fell short. But, realising that the lifeboat was encountering difficulty in finding the wreck, the Vicar of St. Keverne suggested that a rocket should be fired towards her to indicate her position. This was done, and the rocket actually fell between the masts of the liner. It had no line attached, but it had the effect of greatly cheering the survivors in the rigging, who thus knew that

they were seen and that efforts at rescue were being made.

The next day it was possible to realise the full extent of the disaster. But 43 out of 149 had been saved, the rest were lost without hope, and the grim business of searching the shore for bodies began. One by one they came ashore, to be laid out in the little church at St. Keverne, or in farmhouses near the beaches on which the waves had thrown them, whilst there began to appear, posted up in Porthoustock and neighbouring places, pathetic little printed notices—offers of reward by the relatives of the drowned for the finding of the bodies of their dear ones.

The plight of many of the saved was not an enviable one. The stocks of clothing in the village of St. Keverne were soon exhausted, and many of the crew were without funds to buy anything at all. To the aid of the latter came the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society, which took on responsibility for payment. The relatives of members of the crew suffered also, for after having reached Falmouth by train, they were faced with a twenty-mile detour to reach St. Keverne. Many had but slender means; the horses from all the surrounding country were run off their feet, even if the mourners could pay for their hire, and in many cases relatives were stranded without funds either to wait for the coming ashore of the bodies they sought or to return to their homes.

The official enquiry, which was held in the Guildhall, London, occupied several days, and was of a most meticulous nature. Since all the navigating officers were lost, the problem was to prove the mystery of the wrong course, and to discover how so experienced a man as Captain Griffith could have endangered his vessel by coming so close in shore—an act which had given rise to the wildest rumours,

one of which actually suggested that the captain had wilfully lost his ship by steering her on to the Manacles.

A great mass of evidence was taken and sifted; it being proved, for instance, that the night was clear, that Eddystone and other lights were bright, and that the *Mohegan's* compasses were in order.

Interlarded with the technical evidence of experts were tales from survivors which told in modest language of acts of great heroism. John Cruikshank, a boatswain, spoke of the coolness of the captain and officers. After the stranding, Cruikshank cut away an accommodation ladder, as he thought it might be useful to persons struggling in the sea. He was dragging it aft so that it might better clear the ship after she had gone down when he met the second officer and said to him, "This is a bit of all right, isn't it?" The officer smiled, shook hands, but said nothing. He went down with the *Mohegan*, as did all the other officers. Cruikshank later helped ladies to put on their lifebelts and did what he could to lessen their fears, and eventually was rescued by the lifeboat from the mainmast.

Captain Griffith remained on the bridge to the end. There were no officers in any of the boats, and of the thirty stewards on board only two were saved, the remainder perishing whilst doing what they could for the passengers.

The Court of Enquiry announced its decisions on November 27th; but it cannot be said that it threw much light on the affair. It found that the cause of the stranding was that a wrong course had been steered after the *Mohegan* had passed the Eddystone Lighthouse; the cause of the great loss of life was the vessel's taking a sudden and serious list to port, and her going down in less than fifteen minutes, and the fact that there were no lights to indicate her

position to the lifeboat. Quarter-master Juddery, Coxswain Hill, and the crew of the Porthoustock lifeboat were commended for their behaviour.

But on December 22nd the Coroner's inquest at St. Keverne was concluded, and the coroner's final remarks contained a theory—a somewhat drastic one to be sure—about the disaster.

“How,” said the coroner, “the officer in command of the *Mohegan* caused a wrong course to be steered could never be found out. Seeing that the night was clear and the lights of Eddystone and the Lizard were very bright, it seemed almost incredible that such a well-found and well-manned ship could have come to such a fate.”

“But,” he went on to say, “the captain was said to be a rather severe man, and perhaps the officers hesitated to tell him that the course was a wrong one. There had been reports that he had wilfully steered the vessel on the rocks.”

The coroner emphatically observed that there was no evidence whatever in support of the latter insinuation, and a suggested rider inculcating the captain was defeated.

There seems little doubt that in a moment of carelessness or mental aberration Captain Griffith gave a wrong course. But it seems almost incredible that his subordinates, however much they feared their superior officer, should not have told him of his error, even at the eleventh hour; and unless one can accept that their awe of a “severe man” could allow them knowingly to permit the vessel to be steered on the rocks, one must regard this mystery of the sea as an insoluble one.

CHAPTER IV

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE *LONDONIAN*

Wilson & Furness-Leyland Company's Liner
3,614 tons nett Register
Built 1896, Glasgow
Abandoned in North Atlantic, Nov. 23rd, 1898
17 lives lost

This is the story of how a piece of cotton-waste wrecked a ship.

On November 15th, 1898, the *Wilson Liner Londonian* left Boston for London with a company of 70, a cargo of oats and wheat, and 150 head of cattle, under Captain Lee. Seven days out she ran into a strong gale, during which she shipped a great deal of water, and on the next day the gale increased. So far there was no anxiety at all as to the safety of the ship. She was encountering very dirty weather, it is true, but it was not of a kind to cause distress to such a vessel or anxiety to an experienced mariner like Captain Lee.

But on November 23rd, an incident, trivial in itself, occurred, resulting in the loss of the ship, a tremendous fight for life, and heroic rescues which form in themselves veritable epics of the sea.

Whilst encountering very heavy seas, the steering gear suddenly jammed. A more disastrous thing could hardly have happened, for it was then impossible to keep the ship's head on to the mountainous waves which were growing hourly in size as the severity of

the gale increased. The engineers instantly commenced efforts to put the trouble right, and they discovered that a piece of cotton-waste had been accidentally dropped into the mitre wheels controlling the steering gear rods. They began to clear it in desperate haste.

But fate was against them. Whilst they were doing so—and it was not a very lengthy affair—the vessel, unsteerable as she was, broached to, was struck by a heavy sea, and was thrown on her beam ends. A great quantity of water immediately entered the engine-room, and within less than half an hour the ship had become unmanageable, a hulk at the mercy of wind and wave, and, unless visited by extraordinary good luck, doomed to go down.

Lying along as she was, the *Londonian* hardly rose at all to the waves; they broke over her ceaselessly, pitilessly, smashing down a rain of blows upon her and threatening to engulf her at any moment. Efforts were made to lighten the ship, so that she might have a chance of righting herself. To this end, a quantity of the cattle were cast overboard, and one needs but little imagination to visualise the scene upon this stricken ship.

Port scuppers awash, her decks offering but the most meagre foothold to her crew, she wallowed in the trough. Amidst the crash and thunder of the seas that repeatedly struck her and ran in masses of hissing foam from stem to stern, there rose the mournful bellowing of the terrified cattle. Poor beasts! Their lives were of less value than the ship or the lives of her crew. They must go, and they were brought up and driven to take the plunge into the sea, to be swallowed up instantly in the mountains of green water and foam.

But the ship, despite this sacrifice, would not right; her cargo had shifted; and for two days and

nights she drifted, the sport of the angry seas. Her crew were in a desperate condition. It was almost impossible on account of the water in her to get provisions, and of shelter against the wind and spray there was practically none. There was left to them the only hope that they might be sighted by another vessel. It would have to be soon. So heavily did the *Londonian* lurch in the sea that at every shock the crew started up, thinking the end had come, that the ship must go down instantly beneath their feet.

But as day broke on the morning of the 25th there came a ray of hope. Her signals of distress had been seen, and there came, willing to do what she could, the *Vedamore*, owned by W. Johnston & Co. Ltd., under Captain Bartlett. The latter could see what plight the *Londonian* was in, and signalled to Captain Lee, asking if he wished to abandon his ship. The reply was characteristic of an indomitable seaman. He answered that he wished to be taken in tow.

Captain Bartlett, however, saw that this was impossible. He signalled that he refused to make the attempt, as to do so would be to endanger his own vessel; but he would stand by. A little later Captain Lee signalled that he would abandon the *Londonian*, and at noon an attempt to get him and his crew off was made.

But it seemed as if the sea had determined that the company of the *Londonian* was its prey. They should not be rescued; they should go down at the sea's good time, should perish when, drop by drop, all hope had been crushed from them by the hammer blows of the storm.

The sea reckoned without its seamen. With a volunteer crew, Mr. Hobbs, one of the *Vedamore's* officers, succeeded in launching a boat and made

for the *Londonian*. For three hours that handful of men battled with the sea, wearing themselves down to utter exhaustion before they were forced to abandon the attempt. Then Captain Bartlett steered the *Vedamore* to windward and tried to fire rockets with lines attached across the *Londonian*. This also was unsuccessful. It now began to grow dark. No further attempts at rescue were possible that day, and there fluttered from the *Londonian's* mast the pitiful signal: "For God's sake do not leave us." Captain Bartlett replied: "I will stand by till morning."

That was a night of terror for the men of the *Londonian*, a night of watchful anxiety for those of the *Vedamore*. The gale shewed no signs of blowing itself out. If anything, it increased, and with it the anger of the sea.

First thing in the morning the *Vedamore* tried again. For hours lifebuoys with lines attached were thrown into the sea in the hopes that they would drift down and be picked up by the *Londonian*, and at last, after many unsuccessful attempts, a line was picked up. Communication between the two vessels had been established.

A heavier line was now drawn across, and to this one of the *Vedamore's* lifeboats was lashed. This was successfully hauled to the *Londonian* and back, 22 half-frozen and exhausted men being rescued. The boat was then sent across again; but as it was returning one sea capsized it, and the next destroyed it, smashing it to pieces, at the same time breaking the line that had been with such great difficulty established.

This was a terrible blow to the unhappy men remaining in the *Londonian*; but not yet should they be deserted. The *Vedamore's* chief officer, Mr. Doran, offered to make another attempt in a

boat ; but after two hours' work he had got no nearer the stricken ship than sixty yards. He had to give up, and as the boat returned to the *Vedamore* it was dashed to pieces against her side, the crew being saved with lines.

Another night. Then, as soon as it was dawn, the fight for life was resumed. And this time the *Londonian* made an attempt to launch a boat. The first was instantly capsized, her crew being either crushed against the ship or drowned ; but the second got away safely and reached the *Vedamore* with twenty-three men, though this, like the other, was smashed against the steamer's side, and the men, already exhausted by their terrible experiences, had to be dragged aboard with ropes. All day long other attempts were made, but without avail. The *Londonian* was more awash than ever ; it surprised beholders that she was keeping afloat so long.

But when at last light returned on the next day, the sea was scanned in vain. It presented to anxious eyes an unbroken vista of grey rollers tipped with foam. The *Londonian* had vanished.

The *Vedamore* had done her best. She steamed away to her destination, Baltimore, to report another disaster of the sea and the loss of many brave lives.

Seventeen were known to have been lost when the *Londonian* tried to launch her first boat. Forty-five had been rescued by the *Vedamore*. Eight, including Captain Lee, had been forced to remain on board. Was there hope for them ?

As soon as the story of the wreck and rescues became public, hopes were expressed that perhaps the eight had escaped, and on December 14th there came further news and a further stirring story of indomitable courage in the face of the gravest peril.

The steamer *Maria Rickmers*, of Bremen, under Captain Grosch, signalled Cape Henry that she had

on board eight survivors taken from the *Londonian*, and soon the story was told for the expectant world to hear.

Said Captain Lee : " During the night of November 27th we lost sight of the *Vedamore's* lights, and at daybreak she was nowhere to be seen. We made up our minds that nothing short of a miracle could save us. We were drenched, exposed to bitter winds, and unable to reach provisions or water. The ship was slowly but surely sinking, and we felt that at any moment she would take the final plunge."

But at midnight the look-out of the *Maria Rickmers* saw a flare and reported it. Altering her course, the German vessel saw a large steamer, the *Londonian*, almost on her beam ends. She steamed in close, hailed, and received an answer. With great difficulty in the darkness, the second mate, Mr. Lenz, and six men put off in a boat, and after three hours' struggle finally got close to the *Londonian's* stern and shouted to the men, who were huddled together on the bridge, to come aft. A line was then thrown on board the *Londonian*. This the men secured, and lashing themselves to it, threw themselves into the sea and were dragged into the lifeboat.

This rescue, simple as it sounds, was a most noble enterprise. The sea was still running mountains high ; so severe was it, in fact, that the crew of the *Maria Rickmers'* boat and the men they had saved had to be drawn aboard the steamer with lines and the boat abandoned.

The *Londonian*, now deserted, drifted away into the darkness and was seen no more.

The Court of Enquiry in London found that the *Londonian* was not prematurely abandoned by her master and crew, that the wreck was not caused by any wrongful act of her master or officers, and expressed its great appreciation of the conduct of

Captain Bartlett of the *Vedamore* and of Captain Grosch and Mr. Lenz of the *Maria Rickmers*.

The Board of Trade awarded a piece of plate to the two captains, a binocular glass and silver medal to Mr. Doran, of the *Vedamore*, and distributed medals amongst the two crews who had displayed such gallantry in saving life in conditions of almost unparalleled severity.

CHAPTER V

THE CASQUETS' PREY

*London & South-Western Railway Company's
Steamer "Stella"*

1059 tons gross Register

Built 1890, Glasgow

Sunk on the Casquets, Channel Islands

4.11 p.m., Mar. 30th, 1899

88 Passengers, 24 Crew lost

On board the *Bourgogne*, which was sunk after collision with the *Cromartyshire* in fog in 1898 (see page 17), were two rich Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Pollak. They lost their lives; and their heirs, impressed by the dangers to which shipping is subject in fog, made a very laudable effort to prevent further such accidents by contributing 100,000 francs to be competed for by inventors of an apparatus for overcoming fog. Competitions have been held, but the prize has not been won.

Twenty-four years later, in 1922, the "Petit Parisien" was asking what had become of the schemes for such an apparatus and mourning the fact that great efforts had been made for the guidance of fighting ships by the use of acoustic instruments, whilst other vessels lacked such installations. As a matter of fact, most ships carry submarine signalling apparatus, and there are now, of course, such things as "leader" cables laid along channels into port for the assistance of navigators.

These cables are charged with an electric current. Sound instruments on the bridge of a ship are actuated by this current, and it is possible for a navigator to tell by the quality of the sound what is his position in relationship to the cable. In this way a ship can be "led" into port in the densest fog. Such devices are now installed at Portsmouth, Cherbourg, in the vicinity of New York, and elsewhere; but they are not universal. It has been suggested that they might be profitably used for assisting the cross-Channel passages and the passage to the Channel Islands, on all of which routes fog is by no means exceptional. The expense, however, is very great.

One has to remember, too, that it is impossible to eradicate the human element and that the success of all devices of this nature depends on the use made of them. A skipper who will run the risk of keeping his ship going at full speed in fog is as likely to do so with any number of scientific devices to aid him as without, and all the devices in the world will not eliminate the hundredth chance or make the sea fool-proof. Skippers are not always to blame, for there are considerations which influence their conduct that are not immediately observable to the landsman. Half an hour's slowing down on one day may mean the missing of a tide the next, and the missing of a tide may bring in its train innumerable extra expenses to owners from the cost of feeding hundreds of passengers for another day to demurrage and dock dues. No man wantonly risks his ship, her company, and his own reputation and livelihood.

On the other hand, there are men who will take a chance against the wishes and written instructions of their owners in order to have the reputation of being good time-keepers, or because they are sensitive to the complaints of passengers who do not

want to miss connections. They take a risk. "All's well that ends well" is their motto.

In view of the finding of the Court of Enquiry into the loss of the *Stella* it is clear that her master took a chance, and unfortunately it was the chance that did not come off. The *Stella* was lost, many were drowned, including her master, and the Casquets on which she ran at full speed added another victim to the long list which is headed in history with the name of the *White Ship*, which was wrecked upon their jagged fangs in 1119.

The Casquets are an isolated group of rocks rising abruptly out of the water about 8 miles west of Alderney and 23 miles north-east of Guernsey. Upon them is a lighthouse whose flash can be seen in clear weather for 15 miles; there is, of course, the usual foghorn apparatus. The tides in the neighbourhood are very dangerous.

It will be remembered that it was upon the Casquets that the *Matutina*, in Victor Hugo's "Laughing Man", was very nearly wrecked. "The people [of the *Matutina*] heard the dull sound of the waves being sucked within the submarine caves of the steep rock. They made out, under the lighthouse, like a dark cutting between two plates of granite, the narrow passage of an ugly wild-looking little harbour, supposed to be full of the skeletons of men and carcasses of ships. It looked like the mouth of a cavern, rather than the entrance of a port."

About 6.30 a.m. on Friday, March 31st, 1899, the passenger steamer *Vera*, Captain John Winter, of the London & South-Western Railway Co.'s Channel Island service, slowed down, and the passengers on going hurriedly on deck saw two boats approaching them. They were crowded with people, most of whom were wearing lifebelts.

Shipwreck! The word sprang from mouth to

mouth, and the rails of the *Vera* were soon crowded with passengers who were to witness the picking up of survivors of a great sea disaster and learn for the first time that a sister ship of their own had met her end.

There were many women in the boats ; on seeing the *Vera* come close they stood up in their excitement and very nearly caused their own undoing. Captain Winter's voice hailed them, however : " Sit down for God's sake, and I will get you all on board safe." Fortunately they obeyed, and a ladder being lowered, they were taken on board without mishap. There was no weeping, no noise ; they were half-dazed ; their faces were worn with hours of anxiety and white with encrustations of salt from the spray which had dashed over them. They were the first survivors of the wreck of the *Stella*.

The *Stella*, Captain Reeks, owned by the London & South-Western Railway Co., was a ship of 1059 tons gross register. She carried a crew of 43, and on this occasion 174 passengers. She left Southampton on Thursday morning, March 30th, and during the first part of the run to Guernsey, where she was due at 5.30 p.m., met clear weather. After 2.45, however, fog began to gather, and at 3.42 it was observed to be thickening considerably. About 4 o'clock the look-out in the bows sang out to the bridge that he heard a horn blast right ahead. This cry was immediately followed by " Land ahead !", and, as one of the passengers said, " suddenly the Casquets burst on them as if a door had been opened".

Captain Reeks instantly shouted to the helmsman : " Port, hard aport !" The *Stella* came round very fast, grazing some low rocks, but had not gone a length or two before there was a long grating sound and she struck.

The *Stella* immediately took a strong list to port

and began to sink. Though the firemen closed the water-tight doors the rush of water continued, and it was clear that the ship had been ripped right open. There was not a moment to lose, and Captain Reeks gave instant orders for the boats to be got out.

There was no panic, and at the captain's order of "Ladies and children first!" the passengers gave a cheer. Under the supervision of the chief-officer, Mr. Wade, the starboard lifeboat was got away with 33 passengers and 4 of the crew, the starboard cutter with 14 passengers and 10 of the crew, a dinghy with 11 passengers and 2 of the crew, and the port cutter with 26 passengers and 2 of the crew.

On all sides pathetic scenes were being enacted. Such hurried partings, with no knowledge if there will ever be reunions, must always be of a heart-rending nature, and in this shipwreck the loss of life amongst the women was due to their great reluctance to be separated from their husbands. There was little cowardice, and the despair was silent. Of bravery there was much.

The officers and crew acted nobly. Mrs. Rogers, a stewardess, was seen putting lifebelts on to "her ladies" to the very last minute. She gave up her own to the last woman to get into a boat, and when the seamen called out, "Jump in, Mrs. Rogers," she shook her head. "No, no, the boat is full," she said. "If I get in it will sink. Good-bye, good-bye. The Lord have me." She went down with the ship.

To those boats which had got away Captain Reeks shouted to pull for their lives. He knew the danger they ran from the swirl of water, which is ever present in the calmest weather round the Casquets, and from the vortex which would be caused when his ship took the last plunge. He knew, too, that the latter danger was fast approaching. And as the port lifeboat was being lowered to the rail the *Stella*

slipped off the rocks and went down stern first with her bows almost perpendicular. Captain Reeks remained on the bridge and, in the words of a passenger, "went down with his ship magnificently. Steadying himself by a rail, he raised his head to the sky, and remained like a rock."

From the striking to the sinking but eight minutes had elapsed.

It had been impossible for all to leave in so short a time, and it was greatly to the credit of the crew that such boats as were cleared got away from the ship's side so expeditiously.

The task now of the boats was to keep clear of the rocks, against which the rush of the tide threatened to dash them, and willing hands took to the oars. The struggle was, however, well-nigh a superhuman one. One of the boats pulled towards Guernsey for seven hours, and at the end of that time found herself still close to the scene of the wreck, where people could be seen clinging to the rocks. Another was taken in tow by the dinghy, whose crew pulled all night until they fell asleep at the oars. The port lifeboat, which was being lowered when the ship went down, broke away and was eventually the means of saving eight lives.

Her part in the drama was graphically described by a survivor. This gentleman had been helping at the davits when the steamer took the final plunge. He had just time to throw a deck seat overboard and leap into the water, being within 12 feet of the *Stella* when she disappeared and nearly submerged by the suction. He managed, however, to support himself on the seat, and was joined there by others, taking up one poor fellow who could not swim, putting his arms on the timber of the seat, where he held grimly on. After about an hour in the water they saw a boat—the port lifeboat—keel up about 100

yards away. Those who could swim struck out for her, and eventually fifteen managed to clamber upon the keel.

Whilst they were holding on to this precarious support they saw a furniture van which the *Stella* had been carrying go past with about 20 people on it, also a raft made of loose wreckage with about thirty more.

Then the number of those on the lifeboat's keel began to grow less; one by one they dropped off, whilst the rest saw them drown and were helpless to aid them.

Suddenly a wave swept over them, and though it washed three to their deaths, righted the boat so that the remainder were able to clamber in. Having rested awhile, they got out the oars and began to pull. There was need to do so, for the boat was close to the rocks; she was, in fact, very nearly thrown against a reef, but was caught by a race and whirled round and carried out to sea. Here she was caught in a fresh current which swept her past the lighthouse at Alderney into the dangerous Race of Alderney between the island and the coast of France. The survivors were too weary to pull at the oars; they allowed themselves to drift, whilst again and again waves broke over them, keeping them continually drenched to the skin. Six of the occupants died of exposure, one of them, a fireman, who was dressed only in a cotton shirt, making a strenuous fight for life before succumbing to his privations.

They saw three or four steamers, of which one, probably the *Honfleur*, was only a quarter of a mile away; but they were not observed. Sailing ships they also saw, but they were too far away for their attention to be attracted. For twenty-four hours they drifted, until at last, whilst passing close to Ormonville La Hogue, they were sighted by a coast-

guard. This man semaphored to Cherbourg, and at 9 o'clock on the Friday morning the tug *Marsouin* put out to their rescue. She zig-zagged up and down for hours, seen by those in the boat, but unable to see them, and it was not until 1.45 that she found the boat and its survivors, five passengers and three seamen, one of the former being a boy whose life had been saved through his mother's action in tying an inflated football to his coat.

Subsequently the passengers subscribed for and sent to the crew of the *Marsouin* a telescope and fourteen watches in token of their gratitude.

The *Vera*, as has been stated, picked up two boats; they were the starboard lifeboat and the port cutter. Two more, the starboard cutter and the dinghy, were picked up by the Great Western Railway Co.'s ship *Lynx*, the total saved being 112 (88 passengers, 24 crew).

As soon as the news of the disaster reached the Channel Islands arrangements were made to search the scene of the wreck. The London and South-Western Railway Co.'s ships *Honfleur* and *South-Western*, the tug *Alert*, and various Alderney boats going out. The *South-Western*, however, herself ran on a rock and was beached at Cape La Hogue on the coast of France. The *Honfleur* got in touch with the Casquets Lighthouse, and it is of somewhat pathetic interest to note that the lighthouse crew did not know of the disaster which had taken place almost at their very feet. The *Honfleur* signalled to them: "Have you seen or heard of a vessel wrecked?" To this the answer came: "Yesterday afternoon we heard a steamer." And that was all, though, of course, there is not much that the crew could have done in any case. They were not in telegraphic communication with the Channel Islands at the time. If they had been, it is within the bounds

of possibility that further lives might have been saved, for several passengers floated in their lifebelts for some time after the wreck, the bodies being eventually picked up at a great distance. The body of Mr. Collier, ex-mayor of Godalming, was, for instance, picked up by the *Scott Harley*, Captain Wetherall, off Cape Barfleur Lighthouse, about seventy miles away, and other bodies were found from time to time for weeks afterwards on the coast of France.

The *Honfleur* made a complete circle of the Casquets, but discovered only lifebelts, wreckage, and two empty boats containing ladies' clothing, jewellery, money, and an opera-glass case which had been used for bailing.

There was some difficulty in deciding exactly on which rock the *Stella* struck. To the westward of Alderney there are several uninhabited rocks, divided from the island by a passage known as The Swinge; to the westward of these rocks lie the Casquets, separated from them by the passage of the Ortach. The latter is very rarely used by navigators as the current through it resembles at times a mill-race. It was, however, in this passage that the *Stella* struck, although it was supposed by her navigating officer that she was some eight miles to the westward of the Casquets. As she swung round in answer to the helm at the captain's cry of "Port, hard a-port!" she cleared the Casquet Rock, but was caught by the Black Rock, which ripped the bottom out of her. A passenger who happened to be carrying a chronometer gave the time at the moment of impact as 4.11 p.m.

The Court of Enquiry into this disaster opened on April 27th, and was of a protracted nature, its decision not being formulated until May 11th. A great mass of evidence was sifted, much of it being

of a more or less irrelevant character, such matters as whether or not survivors picked up by the *Vera* had been asked to pay for the coffee given them there taking up much of the court's time.

It soon began to appear, however, that the speed of the *Stella* was greater than it should have been in the circumstances, surviving passengers who had made the trip on previous occasions stating that during the ill-fated voyage they had commented on the speed with which they were carrying on through fog.

An interesting point was discussed as to whether the Casquets' fog-horn had not been heard earlier through its blast happening to coincide with that of the *Stella's* syren, which was giving one prolonged blast (four to six seconds) every two minutes, according to the Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. This point was not definitely cleared up, though it appeared that the lighthouse's horn had not been heard until a few moments before the rocks loomed up through the fog.

It was also suggested that Captain Reeks had been anxious on account of complaints, not emanating from his owners, with regard to the unpunctuality of his arrivals in port. If this was the case—and there is no evidence to prove it definitely—he had paid for his sensitiveness with his life.

The Court's decision was given out in the form of answers to a large number of questions. The answers which dealt with the equipment of the *Stella* and her management by the owners cleared the latter of blame. The cause of the stranding and the consequent loss of life was found to be due to the fact that the *Stella* "had not made good the course set, and that the master continued at full speed in thick weather when he must have known that his vessel was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Casquets without taking any steps to verify his

position." The Court also strongly recommended that there should be telegraphic communication between the Casquets Lighthouse and the nearest island from which assistance could be obtained.

Overlooking the shipping at Southampton is a stone seat which was erected to the memory of Mrs. Rogers, of the *Stella*. And whilst mentioning this memorial to a brave woman doubt rises in the mind as to the wisdom of the cry of "Women and children first!"

Whilst no one for an instant can bear the thought of a reckless scramble for boats during shipwreck, or could tolerate the sight of a man who had saved himself at the expense of a woman, it seems that the women themselves prefer to be treated as men's equals when faced by the possibility of suffering and death at sea.

The women of the *Stella* were, as we know, reluctant to be parted from their men who remained behind, and women have been equally reluctant during other shipwrecks. They wish to take their chance with their menfolk. If life is granted to both, good; if death, then there is no parting, for bitter as death may be, its bitterness and unknown terrors may well be preferred to drawn-out years of sorrowful memories.

CHAPTER VI

THE TALE OF TWO RAFTS

Norwegian Barque

"Drot"

*Abandoned in the
Atlantic*

August 11th, 1899

15 lost

Hudart Parker & Co's

Steamer "Elingamite"

2,585 tons gross Register

Built 1887, Newcastle

*Stranded off Three Kings
Islands, New Zealand*

10.45, Nov. 9th, 1902.

30 lost

Every high-spirited boy who has read *Robinson Crusoe* or *Swiss Family Robinson* must have expressed at some time or another a desire to go to sea. If shipwreck and an escape on a raft can be thrown in, so much the better.

Regarding the first desire, all is well. But the latter is one of those romantic thoughts best left in the realms of romance. Disillusionment at first hand would be a bitter thing.

However, a less painful but still powerful method of disillusionment can be practised by reading two stories of shipwreck, those of the *Drot* and the *Elingamite*, and following in thought the unhappy survivors as, lying on their rafts, the sport of wind and wave, they traversed the whole gamut of physical and mental suffering.

In the Louvre, in Paris, there hangs a picture by Gericault. It is called "The Raft of the *Medusa*"—the *Medusa* was a French frigate which was

wrecked in 1816 in disgraceful circumstances—and those who study that picture, with its almost kinematographic vividness, projecting themselves into it, as it were, cannot fail to understand, even if only for one second of inspiration, what it means to be shipwrecked and cast away upon a raft. Then, perhaps, will be more clearly realised what the survivors of the wrecks of the *Drot* and the *Elingamite* suffered.

The Norwegian barque *Drot*, with a crew of 17 men all told, left Pascalonga for Buenos Ayres at the beginning of August, 1899. A few days out she encountered very heavy weather, and on August 10th she met with a serious disaster, the captain and eight men being swept overboard by a great sea which threw the barque on her beam ends and carried away her boats.

The remaining eight decided to abandon their vessel, and to this end constructed a raft, and on it entrusted themselves to the mercy of the sea.

The sea was in vicious mood. The nine men swept from the deck and engulfed instantly had met with mercy. No such swift death was to come to the rest.

The first thing the sea did was to smash this hastily made craft in halves, on one of which were six men, on the other two. The latter were carried away and heard of no more, leaving the six to make what they could of life granted to them without either food or water.

For a time they managed to keep up a certain amount of hope and self-respect. One of them had brought hooks and a line, and they maintained life by catching fish. But on the fourth day after the abandonment, this man, becoming mad from the lack of drinking water, jumped overboard and was drowned.

Two days later, two more went, dying of

exhaustion, leaving two Swedes, Thomassen and Anderson, and a German seaman, three gaunt-eyed, half-crazed men, who for six days had drunk nothing and eaten only raw fish. Already the strain was beginning to make itself manifest, and can one altogether blame them when their thoughts began to turn in a certain direction, their eyes to shun each others, but to turn with significant looks upon the bodies of their dead comrades?

They did not speak; they did not put their thoughts and intentions into words. One by one they drew their knives, and soon the veins of the dead men were yielding up their blood, sucked by the frenzied, despairing lips of the men who hoped to live.

Terrible as this sustenance was it brought back hope to the three men. For a time the insanity bred of their sufferings retreated. They consigned the dead bodies to the deep and once more began to keep watch and watch for a sail.

But no sail came in sight. Their suffering eyes saw only a dreary vista of grey seas, broken by slashes of white foam and the wake from the fins of sharks. The bodies had attracted them, and round and round, plunging, sporting, shewing now and then their wide open, eager jaws, impatient of their prey, they swam, ghastly escort of the raft which to the music of the wind was dancing upon the waves its grisly dance of death.

Again despair came to the three. Once more their minds were blackened with terrible thoughts; they even began to regret their hastiness in throwing the dead bodies overboard; their thoughts dwelt only on food—any food.

There were three of them, all of about equal strength. One must die to help the others live. Quickly the business was gone through, the lots

cast, the decision of fate made. It fell to the German to die. It must have come as glad news to him, for, we are told, he tore open his shirt with willingness, baring his breast for the knife-thrust.

The survivors were on the raft for three weeks in all. On September 1st, they were at last seen about 250 miles south of Charleston by the steamer *Woodruff*, of Cardiff, and an unforgettable sight was presented to the men of that ship as they looked down on the castaways.

Thomassen and Anderson were both in a fearful mental condition, being on the verge of complete insanity. Between them lay the half-devoured body of the German, and one of them could hardly be torn from his meal as the men of the *Woodruff* lifted him into their boat. Thomassen was almost dead. He could hardly have survived many more hours, and he was bleeding from scores of wounds about the face and chest. They had been caused by his companion who, in his madness, had attacked him with tooth and nail, endeavouring to devour him alive. The sharks were still keeping watch.

The two men were taken to Charleston and handed over to the care of the Swedish consul, who sent them to hospital, where they eventually recovered from the effects of their terrible experience.

The *Elingamite*, a steamer of 2,585 tons nett register, owned by Hudart Parker & Co., plied between Sydney and Auckland, passing to the north of New Zealand and going down the east coast. A glance at the map will shew that the most northerly point in New Zealand consists of a group of islands known as Three Kings Islands, and that they are practically due east of Sidney. It was upon a rock outstanding from one of these islands that the *Elingamite* was driven at full speed during fog on November 9th, 1902.

The circumstances of the stranding were dramatic in the extreme. A few moments before the ship struck, the captain, suddenly seeing breakers through the fog on the port bow about two cables' lengths distant, sprang to the engine-room telegraph and ordered full speed astern. Had not an unlucky trick of fate intervened at this moment, the ship would probably have been saved.

But the engines were not reversed. Instead, the 3rd engineer rushed on deck to inform the captain that the reversing-gear refused to act, and as he was doing so the ship struck.

She was badly holed. To the expert eyes of the seamen it was clear that she could not remain afloat long, and the crew began to get ready and provision the boats. There was not time, however, to complete this task, and though all got away from the sinking steamer, it was in boats and on rafts not properly equipped or provisioned.

And now an inexplicable thing happened. The boats and rafts parted company. Exactly why the former did not stand by the rafts is not at all clear; it was obviously their duty to do so, since the latter could only drift at the will of wind and wave, and the subsequent Court of Enquiry made particular mention of this point. However, in the confusion of shipwreck, strange things can happen. The parting took place, and the calvary of those on one of the rafts began.

There were sixteen persons on it. In spite of the fact that three had previously been taken off, it was still overloaded. It was partly submerged and could not be steered—was, in fact, nothing but a hulk which, from the way it behaved, might have been specially constructed for the torture of the unhappy people who clung to its wave-washed timbers.

A few hours after it had left the steamer's side it

provided the first agony. Other rafts and some of the boats had reached one of the islands ; but this raft actually drifted to within a hundred yards of the shore, but then, despite the despairing efforts of those on board, was washed out to sea again, and when the sun rose on the following morning land was nowhere to be seen.

The survivors now saw the full gravity of their position. And a terrible position it was. Nothing could be done to propel the raft in any direction, right or wrong, and not even the crumb of comfort provided by effort to save themselves was granted to these unhappy people. The food possessed by the sixteen amounted to two apples. There was no water.

On Monday, the day after the shipwreck, one of the apples was divided into sixteen parts. The other was to be kept as long as humanly possible, since they had no idea how far from the scene of the wreck they might drift or whether news of the disaster had reached any ship that could come and search for them.

On this day their sufferings were dreadful, and during the following night three passengers died.

On Tuesday the weather was fine, but the sea was wrapped in mist. The sufferers had not the satisfaction of keeping look-out round the wide horizon for sight of sail or smudge of smoke, and were tormented by the feeling that ships were passing close to them, unconscious of their presence and the agonies they were enduring.

And during that night, the very thing they dreaded happened, but in such a way as to add to their feelings of despair.

The atmosphere had cleared, and about midnight they saw the lights of a steamer. What hopes those lights and the steady pulse of her engines put into

that unhappy band! She came nearer and nearer, bearing a promise of succour. The survivors roused themselves to shout, and though this was more like the dry croak of ravens in a desert than a human cry for aid, it was heard.

The beat of the steamer's engines ceased; they could see her side-lights gleaming red and green, and, as she swung, the cheerful line of porthole lights. They heard orders shouted, then the creak of oars in rowlocks. A boat had been lowered. Only a few minutes more—then food, clothing, soft beds, gentle hands, soothing voices, and an end to agony and the desire for death.

And then the boat went past. In the darkness it missed them by less than fifty yards. It returned to the ship, was hoisted aboard, and the steamer went on her way.

The reaction following this incident was terrible, and one of the passengers, crazed by disappointment, sprang from the raft and was drowned.

On the following day the second apple was divided. But the lack of fresh water caused greater suffering than hunger. In spite of warnings, several drank sea water, and on this day two, becoming insane, threw themselves overboard to drown.

Throughout that day and the next night the survivors lay helpless. The flame of life was burning low. No longer had they the spirit even to try and inspire hope and courage in one another. They were soaked with sea-water, blistered by the sun, fearfully emaciated, and without sufficient strength to raise themselves up to scan the horizon.

They had abandoned hope. They lay, desiring nothing but speedy death to cut short their sufferings.

A stewardess, who had behaved with the greatest heroism, and a steward died on this day.

And then at last succour came. Within four hours of the last death the survey-ship *Penguin*, which, with the *Zealandia* and other ships, had been searching since news of the wreck had reached Wellington, sighted the raft and picked up the eight survivors.

The *Zealandia* had fallen in with one boat and two rafts, the total number of saved being 149 out of 179. Though the sea was combed over a wide area—wreckage was picked up 92 miles away—and the islands and mainland thoroughly searched, no other survivors were ever found.

The Court of Enquiry subsequently said that “owing to a defect in the engines, the reversing gear failed to act, but nevertheless the captain was responsible for the loss of the ship. He had driven her at full speed during fog, omitting to sound, and altering the ship’s course without sufficient reason.” The captain and chief officer were blamed for the fact that the boats were not properly equipped, and the former’s certificate was suspended for a year and he was ordered to pay £50 towards the costs of the enquiry.

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CHAPTER VII

“ MISSING ”

H.M.S. Condor, Sloop
Displacement 980 tons
Launched, Dec. 1898
Lost at sea with all
hands between Esqui-
malt and Honolulu
Dec. 1901

Blue Anchor Liner “ Wara-
tab
9339 tons gross Register
Built 1908, Glasgow
Lost at sea between Durban
and Cape Town
July 28th, 1909
92 Passengers, 119 Crew
drowned

Says Conrad, in *The Mirror of the Sea*, “On some days there appears (in ‘Shipping Intelligence’) the heading ‘Overdue’—an ominous threat of loss and sorrow trembling yet in the balance of fate. There is something sinister to a seaman in the very grouping of the letters which form the word, clear in its meaning, and seldom threatening in vain.

“Only a few days more—appallingly few to the hearts which had set themselves bravely to hope against hope—three weeks, a month later, perhaps, the name of ships under the blight of the ‘Overdue’ heading shall appear again in the column of ‘Shipping Intelligence,’ but in the final declaration of ‘Missing’.

“‘The ship, or barque, or brig So-and-So, bound from such a port, with such and such a cargo, for such another port, having left at such and such a date, last spoken at sea on such a day, and never

having been heard of since, was posted to-day as missing.'

"Such in its strictly official eloquence is the form of funeral orations on ships that, perhaps wearied with a long struggle, or in some unguarded moment that may come to the readiest of us, had let themselves be overwhelmed by a sudden blow from the enemy."

In our day there have been two great cases of ships disappearing at sea. From neither of these disasters has anyone survived to tell the manner of the ends. We know not whether they came with devastating suddenness, whether those the ships bore went to their deaths under a single, unexpected, and overwhelming blow of the sea, rising in its might and crushing them in an appalling, titanic moment of terror, or whether the last moments of these ships, "wearied with a long struggle", came with peace, the sea receiving ships and men gently to its bosom, a resting-place after endurance greater than steel or flesh can be expected to bear.

The first of these tragedies of the sea was that of H.M.S. *Condor*. She was a sloop, with a displacement of 980 tons, a length of 180 feet, principal armament of six 4-in. guns, and was barque-rigged, that is, having square sails on the fore and main masts, and fore-and-aft sails on the mizzen. She was therefore capable of proceeding under canvas if her engines by any chance broke down. She was of steel, was launched at Sheerness in December, 1898, and is, of course, not to be confused with *Condor* in which Lord Charles Beresford distinguished himself during the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882.

Condor left Esquimalt, Vancouver Island, on December 2nd, 1901, for Honolulu, distant about 2,580 miles, being due at the latter place on December 15th. There was then no telegraphic, nor, of course,

wireless, communication with Honolulu, and it was not, therefore, until January 24th that any great degree of anxiety as to *Condor's* fate began to be expressed. On that day the Secretary of the Admiralty regretted that nothing had been heard of *Condor* since she had left Esquimalt.

The anxiety that was then felt was moderated somewhat by the fact that had *Condor's* engines broken down and she had been forced to resort to sails, she would, if encountering light or contrary winds, take much longer in reaching Honolulu than if using steam.

Nevertheless, arrangements were made for search for the missing sloop. H.M.S. *Phaeton*, cruiser, Capt. E. J. Fleet, was ordered to proceed to Esquimalt and to follow the probable track of *Condor* to the latitude of San Francisco and then to proceed to the westward; the survey ship *Egeria*, Commander C. H. Simpson, was detailed to search the west coast of Vancouver Island; masters of ships leaving San Francisco for the westward were also asked to keep a look-out for *Condor*; and the United States government was requested to be good enough to ascertain from their officials on the coast between Vancouver and San Francisco whether intelligence had been received of any British ship in distress.

With this request the U.S.A. government complied, and also ordered the Chief of the Revenue Cutter Service of San Francisco to send the cutter *McCulloch* as far out and as far north as the mouth of the Columbia River, whilst the cutter *Grant* searched to the northward of that point.

On January 26th, however, *Phaeton* arrived at San Francisco, having made no discoveries of any sort.

But on the 28th the steamer *Queen City* arrived at Victoria from the west coast of Vancouver Island

and reported that off Ahousett she had picked up a white boat bearing a broad arrow and the letter C in brass on her bows.

This was the first clue to the fate of *Condor*. The boat was soon identified as undoubtedly from the sloop, and it was now taken as a certainty that she had been lost. The absence of any wreck on the coast of Vancouver Island or any other coast in the neighbourhood pointed only too strongly to the supposition that she had foundered during the severe gale which it was known she must have encountered. Hope that there might be survivors, however, still lingered, for it was not unknown for very long voyages in open boats to have been made, and it was still within the bounds of possibility that a number of men from *Condor* might turn up even on the other side of the Pacific.

On February 11th *Egeria* returned to Victoria with more wreckage—a grating, boat signal-box, and other small articles from her upper-deck—all positively identified as having come from the sloop.

But the hopes that survivors might be found was never realised. “Hearts set themselves bravely to hope against hope” that there might be one man at least saved from *Condor*; but time went on and none came back from the sea to tell the manner of the ship’s end.

As is usual in cases such as this, there were all kinds of rumours going about for a long time after the disappearance of the sloop, some of which may have been founded on fact. It was said, for instance, that Indians saw off Port San Juan a big ship pitching heavily, and that “by-and-by no more come up”. Perhaps these Indians did see the end of *Condor*.

Whilst the present writer was on the Pacific Slope in 1910 he heard a strong rumour to the effect that a very low tide had revealed to the gaze of

fishermen near Cape Mendocino, Humboldt County, California, the wreckage of a steel ship covered with rust and seaweed. This was firmly believed by many people in California to be all that remained of H.M.S. *Condor*. But the story appears to have had very little foundation. The wreck, if wreck there was—and this, of course, is not outside the bounds of possibility—has never been taken seriously as that of *Condor*, and has certainly not been accepted by the Admiralty.

The second case of the disappearance of a ship at sea with which we are dealing here concerns a liner. She was the Blue Anchor Liner *Waratah*, of 9,339 tons gross register, Captain J. I. Ibery, and she disappeared between Durban and Cape Town whilst on a voyage, the second of her existence, from Australia to London via the Cape.

The case of the *Waratah* is, perhaps, the most celebrated of all such “mysteries of the sea”. Not only is the character of her fate unknown to this day, but the disaster was accompanied by so great a maze of rumours and allegations, of fears, hopes, disappointments, presentiments, and even of hoaxes, that it is only with difficulty that a plain story can be told. The *Waratah* was “in the news” from the time she became overdue in 1909 until 1911, and even now it is possible that we have not seen an end to theories with regard to her loss. In the celebrated case of the *Madagascar*, a Blackwall clipper, which disappeared in 1853, the “truth” about her end was forthcoming in a romantic yarn from South America no less than forty years later.

The *Waratah* left Durban at 8 p.m. on July 26th, 1909. At 4 a.m. on the 27th the *Clan Macintyre*, which had left Durban earlier on the same day as the *Waratah*, sighted her. The former signalled:

“What ship?”

The answer came :

“*Waratah* for London.”

The *Clan Macintyre* then signalled :

“*Clan Macintyre* for London. What weather had you from Australia ? ”

“Stormy. South-westerly and southerly wind across.”

“Thanks,” said the *Clan Macintyre*. “Good-bye, pleasant voyage.”

“Thanks. Same to you. Good-bye.”

It was “Good-bye ” indeed, for the *Waratah* was never spoken or sighted again.

As soon as it became clear that the *Waratah* must have met with some misadventure and was seriously overdue, arrangements were made to search for her on a large scale. H.M.S. *Pandora*, cruiser, was sent from East London on August 2nd, and covered an area of 250 square miles, returning to Durban on the 10th with nothing to report, save that she had experienced heavy gales ; H.M.S. *Forte*, cruiser, from Simonstown, returned on the 11th after searching for 1,320 miles with nothing to report ; and H.M.S. *Hermes*, from Durban, also searched in vain. On August 12th the *Geelong*, another of the Blue Anchor Line’s vessels, went out to search, and the *Sabine*, of the Union Castle Line, specially chartered by the *Waratah*’s owners, covered 2,700 miles without finding any trace of the missing liner.

Whilst these searches were being made there were in circulation all kinds of reports from those which told of the sighting of the *Waratah* to the finding of bodies. It was even suggested that she had been destroyed by fire. On August 13th there came news from Cape Town that the steamer *Insizwa* had passed in the neighbourhood of the mouth of the Bashee River four objects which looked like bodies. The spot where these were observed was attracting a

large number of birds. As a result of this report the naval authorities sent *Miltiades* from Durban to look for the bodies, and the tug *Harry Escombe* left East London on the same mission. No bodies were found, but the tug reported having sighted whale refuse, which would, of course, attract birds.

Members of the crew of the *Tottenham*, Captain Edward Cox, from Australia for Antwerp via Durban, also had remarkable stories to tell. Between the Bashee River and East London they reported seeing dead bodies floating. One man spoke of the body of a girl in a red cloak, and a Chinese spoke of “Plenty dead bodies”. On hearing of this, Captain Cox immediately rushed to the bridge and put his ship about. No bodies or wreckage were, however, picked up.

The *Guelph* said that at 9.51 p.m. on July 27th, when off Cape Hood, she had sighted a large passenger steamer five miles away signalling in Morse. The signals were not very distinct, but the officers made out the three letters t, a, h. If this was the *Waratah*, she was making no signals of distress, although she could then only have travelled seventy miles since falling in with the *Glan Macintyre*, and as she was a 13-knot steamer this pointed to an engine breakdown having occurred.

Suggestion of fire in the *Waratah* came through a report from the *Harlow*, Captain A. J. Bruce, from Newport for Durban. About 5.30 on July 27th when off Cape Hermes the officers on the bridge observed bush fires. At the same time they saw smoke from the horizon astern about twenty-five miles away, and said that it gave the impression of a steamer coming up very fast. At 7.15 they saw two masthead lights and a red light. Shortly afterwards there were two great flashes of fire, one rising about 1,000 feet, the other about 300 feet in the air.

They appeared to be about six miles away. The lights of the steamer were not seen again, though at the speed at which she appeared to be going she should have caught up the *Harlow*.

It was a case of hoping against hope. The *Waratah* had gone with all in her, and yet neither owners nor relatives of those she carried could persuade themselves to the distressful truth. False hopes were continually raised either that the liner was still afloat though crippled, or that wreckage had positively been found. On August 9th, for instance, a liner was seen making her way slowly towards Durban. "It is the *Waratah*!" was the cry on every lip. It was not, but was another ship making her way in after a severe buffeting. The *Port Caroline* was four days overdue after leaving Table Bay for Australia. Instantly it was suggested that she had picked up the *Waratah* and was towing her into port. Even a year later rumour would not let the *Waratah* alone, and on December 16th, 1910, it was reported in East London that deck-chairs marked *Waratah* had been washed up at Coffee Cove.

On August 18th, 1909, the owners of the *Waratah* held that if the ship had foundered wreckage would surely have been found. They were still hopeful that the *Waratah* would return to port.

But the very next day the steamer *Bannockburn*, from New York for New Zealand, arrived at Albany, West Australia, short of coal. She had left Cape Town on July 24th, and on the 26th had encountered an east-north-east gale of unprecedented violence. A deck cargo of coal had shifted and the steamer had been thrown on her beam ends in imminent danger of foundering. Her captain made the significant statement that he had no doubt about the fate of the *Waratah*.

On August 20th the Government and Admiralty

abandoned the search. On December 8th the *Waratah* was “Posted for Inquiry” at Lloyd’s, this being the usual preliminary to regarding a ship as lost, and on December 15th she was posted “Missing”.

Still hope, however, lingered. On February 25th, 1910, the *Wakefield* left Durban for Australia via the Crozet, Heard, and Macdonald Islands and Kerguelen Land to search for the wreck or possible castaways of the *Waratah*. She arrived in June, having found no sign whatever of the missing ship and having encountered a ceaseless succession of gales.

The Board of Trade instituted an enquiry which was opened in London on December 15th, 1910, and lasted until February 22nd, 1911, and it may be said that with the possible exception of the enquiry into the loss of the *Titanic* no such investigation has commanded so much attention from the general public. Not only was the public mind intrigued by the mystery which surrounded the ship’s loss, but it was amazed at the contradictory and at times sensational character of the evidence given.

This cannot be gone into at any length here. There were those who said that the *Waratah* struck them as being “top-heavy” and “tender”, and that she carried a severe list; there were those who said that they had noticed no list and considered her quite a comfortable vessel. But one witness created a sensation by giving evidence of a kind not usually found in the matter-of-fact atmosphere of a court. This witness was a Mr. C. G. Sawyer. He said that he had been a passenger in the *Waratah* as far as Durban, where he got off, the reason for his so doing being his fear of the vessel—fear which had been partly bred in him through a dream.

Three or four nights before reaching Durban he dreamt that he saw a man holding in his right hand

a long sword and in his left a rag or cloth saturated with blood. He experienced this dream three times on the same night, and it was so clear that he could afterwards have drawn the design of the sword the man held. He took the dream to be a warning, and at Durban left the ship.

Nor was this all. Whilst at Durban on July 28th he had another dream. In this he saw a ship in big waves. One big wave "went over her bows and pressed her down. She rolled over on her starboard side and disappeared". On August 4th he cabled to his wife explaining what he had done. He was heartily congratulated by counsel on being present at the enquiry.

An instance occurs here of the way in which rumours can be manufactured, and spread, and of the necessity for care in winnowing wheat from chaff; also, it may be said, of the extraordinary mentality of those who consider such a case as this a fit subject for hoaxes.

It was stated during the enquiry that a Captain Brendon, master of a steamer named *Talis*, had said that he sighted the *Waratah* between 5 and 6 p.m. on July 27th, 250 miles south of Durban. No such ship could be discovered, and no such man could be found in the records as a master-mariner; enquiries at the address in London at which he was supposed to be living proved that no man named Brendon had ever been at that address. The whole thing appeared to be a hoax.

The decision of the court, briefly given, was that the *Waratah* was lost in a gale on July 28th, 1909, this gale being of exceptional violence and the first great storm she had encountered. The court could not say what particular form was taken by the catastrophe, but was inclined to think that the vessel capsized. She was supplied with sufficient boats and

life-saving appliances. She was manned considerably in excess of the Board of Trade requirements. The cargo was properly stowed and had sufficient stability. The *Waratah* was in proper trim for the voyage, was in good condition as regards structure, and so far as the evidence went was in a seaworthy condition.

Since the day on which it was realised that the *Waratah* was lost, many ingenious theories have been advanced to account for her disappearance. One suggestion was that she was carried into a “blow-hole ” in the high rugged cliff of the neighbouring coast, a “blow-hole” being a cavern into which a very strong current is drawn by a kind of subterranean volcano. There is, surely, something grotesque about this idea, reminding one of the paper-boat in Hans Andersen’s story of the little tin-soldier, and one can hardly imagine a ship of the size of the *Waratah* being sucked into a hole in the cliff much in the manner of a paper-boat going down a drain.

In May, 1930, it was suggested that airmen had seen the *Waratah* lying under a vast rocky ledge beneath the sea. Whilst it is a fact that it is possible to see a great depth into the water from the air, the *Waratah* could hardly be recognisable after the lapse of so many years. Not only would tide, current, and the action of rust have practically disintegrated her, but the masses of seaweed which would have collected on her remains in the natural course would have so masked her as to make her indistinguishable from the surrounding sea-bottom.

There will doubtless be for years yet to come theories formulated by the ingenious and the romantic, but the truth about the last moments of the *Waratah* will never be known until the day comes when the sea lets go its secrets and gives up its dead.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOLOCAUST OF THE *GENERAL SLOCUM*

*Knickerbocker Steamship Co.'s Excursion Steamer
Destroyed by Fire
East River, New York
Morning of June 15th, 1904
1,200 Dead*

Although the disaster which overcame the *General Slocum* cannot with strict accuracy be called a shipwreck, its various circumstances and its magnitude demand attention. They place it in a category of its own, a category of one, for never before or since has such an appalling occurrence, accompanied with every detail of horror, marred the history of ships.

Here is no epic of valiant hearts fighting the elements, no stirring tale of men battling against the known and expected weapons of the sea ; here only are suffering and terror against a background of human weakness and culpability.

On the morning of June 15th, 1904, the excursion steamer *General Slocum*, Captain Van Shaick, owned by the Knickerbocker Steamship Co. of New York, took on board some 1800 women and children, parishioners of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is situated in the most densely populated districts of New York's East Side, having been specially chartered for an outing in connection with the Sunday School to Forest Grove, Long Island Sound.

Broadly speaking, the *General Slocum* was emin-

ently suited for such a trip ; she resembled a floating hotel more than a ship, being of the four-decker, low free-board, beam-engined type familiar in pictures of America's inland waterways. She was the sort of vessel in which the women and children of this party would feel as safe as in their own homes. There was no sea with its caprices to be encountered ; although it was a windy day there was no need for dread of sickness. The *General Slocum* would but barely rock in the wake of some passing vessel. The sun shone, the band played, and it was a gay, chattering, laughing throng that trooped aboard at a pier near Brooklyn Bridge.

And within an hour came disaster. Not by shipwreck, not by collision, stranding, or any unseaworthiness of the vessel, but in more terrible form—by fire.

From Brooklyn Bridge the *General Slocum's* direction would be almost due north. To reach Long Island Sound she would have to pass through Hell Gate, the narrow channel in East River, which has since been considerably widened by blasting and dredging, and it was whilst approaching this channel and at a point opposite the end of 138th-street that the fire broke out.

Exactly how it started has never been learnt. First reports said that a pan of fat was upset in the cook's galley, and that the fat ran about in flames, setting fire to adjacent woodwork. Later—and accepted by the coroner—it was stated that the point of origin of the outburst was a storage room on the starboard side forward, in which were oils, paint, rope, camp-stools, and other inflammable articles.

At the first alarm of fire Captain Van Shaick instantly prepared to beach his vessel. He would have run into the 138th-street shore slip, but owing to the great oil tanks on the Harlem beach feared

that a worse calamity might ensue. He therefore made for North Brother Island, distant about half a mile. But that half mile cost countless lives.

The ship was built almost entirely of wood, and caught freely. She burnt, in fact, like tinder, and within a few seconds, not minutes, was well ablaze, and the flames, fanned by the strong wind, spread with appalling rapidity to the upper decks. Those who have never seen the speed with which fire under the influence of a high wind can run through even comparatively unflammable material can hardly imagine how rapidly the *General Slocum* blazed up. Almost coincident with the first flash of flame the ship was burning furiously amidships, and the fire, impelled by the head wind, was rushing towards the stern, where, unhappily, most of the women and children were gathered.

The scene had changed ; where there had been happiness and laughter there were now terror and the shrieking of panic-stricken souls. The hundreds of passengers fled back from the advancing flames, crowding to the rails, death by fire behind them, death by drowning ahead. In the first stampede dozens of women as well as children were trampled underfoot and killed ; the *General Slocum* had become a pyre upon which 1,800 people, unused to any form of peril, were fighting madly for their lives.

In some places, where the rush was greatest, the rails burst, precipitating a mass of struggling, shrieking women and children into the water, where, in the rush of the tide, they were swiftly carried away to their deaths. In others, the flames lashed out greedily at the press of victims jammed helplessly together and devoured them as they stood. The clothing of children caught fire as they clung, shrieking, to their mothers' knees, babies were burnt to death as they lay in their mothers' arms.

In parts where the fire had not instantly penetrated efforts were being made in some measure to cope with the terrible situation ; and it is here that one has unfortunately to speak of things that should not have been. The crew manned the pumps and hoses ; but in some cases no water came ; in others, where there was water, the hoses were rotten and burst. There were 2,500 lifebelts on the ship ; but they were for the most part lashed to the ceilings where no children and only the tallest women could reach them. In many cases they were lashed with wire and, more terrible to relate, were worse than useless when eventually cut free. Many who donned the lifebelts and sprang overboard were instantly drowned, the belts, filled with a mixture of cork and glue, carrying them down like stones.

Other means for saving the lives of children were tried. Frantic mothers placed their little ones in deck-chairs or lashed them to boards and threw them overboard before they themselves leapt from the certainty of death by fire to the probability of death by water. Several of the men, of whom there were but 100 aboard, seized children and leapt into the water, striking out for the shore or approaching boats. A dozen or so little ones were saved in this way.

Meanwhile, the fire had, of course, been observed by spectators on other vessels and ashore, and the alarm had been given. Within a few minutes of the first warning blast of the *General Slocum's* syren, tugs, fire-floats, and small boats were rushing to her assistance. But they could do little ; before the first had reached her side the upper works collapsed, precipitating scores into the furnace below. So fierce was the blaze that many of these would-be rescuers were beaten off, and only the most heroic succeeded in saving any lives.

One tug dashed in and was lashed by its crew to one of the *General Slocum's* paddle-wheels, on the box of which there were 200 people. It rescued as many as it could hold and then itself burst into flames. A cry of horror rose from those who had thought themselves saved, and had it not been for the promptitude and bravery of a negro deck-hand, who flung a tarpaulin over the outbreak and rushed for a hose, this tug also would have been destroyed. Many smaller boats did brave work, clinging to the flaming steamer's side till they too began to burn, or rowing in and out of the charred wreckage, searching desperately for signs of life amidst the mass of débris and huddled bodies that dripped in flames into the vessel's wake.

Whilst this was going on the *General Slocum* was still moving towards North Brother Island. Though a mass of flame and smoke, her engines still revolved, and she went slowly forward, with tugs and fire-floats pouring tons of water into her, until at last she grounded.

There was still life in her, but even now the toll of death was not complete. As soon as she struck, many of the women, driven to frenzy by what they had seen and endured, flung themselves overboard, to be drowned before they could struggle into shallower water.

The *General Slocum* was now but a shell. All round her the water was clogged with charred wood and charred bodies, many burnt beyond all possibility of recognition, and into this grim flotsam the small boats made their way, picking up body after body for a rapid examination in case a spark of life might yet linger, and now and then pulling frantically for a spot where an arm was suddenly thrust up amidst the wreckage and a cry for help rose from some unfortunate half-drowned or half-burnt survivor

The hospitals in the north-east part of New York and the Williamsburgh district of Brooklyn had been informed of what had happened, and preparations had been made for the reception of the injured. Unfortunately there were not many who escaped even at the cost of severe hurt. It is not possible to say the exact number of deaths in this terrible disaster. On the evening of June 15th 600 bodies had been picked up, and between 600 and 700 persons were still missing. The total death roll, however, of the 1,800 who went aboard the *General Slocum* on that unhappy day was later computed to be in the neighbourhood of 1,200, an appalling number to be lost in so short a time, for there elapsed between the first alarm of fire and the burning of the ship to the water's edge on North Brother Island only half an hour.

Great difficulty was encountered in the work of identification of the victims. They were taken ashore and placed in three rows stretching from one end of East 26th-street Pier to the other, and to this mortuary came the husbands and the brothers and the sons of the dead. The scenes on the *General Slocum* had been terrible; parallel to them were those enacted during the long hours of the identification, as relatives, many of them hysterical and shrieking at the awful sights before their eyes, trooped up and down the rows of corpses.

The neighbourhood was strongly guarded by police whose duty it was to stem the rush of morbid sight-seers who flocked from all quarters to the scene of sorrow. Incidentally, they frustrated no less than twenty attempts at suicide on the part of grief-maddened searchers after lost ones.

And then came the work of fixing the responsibility. Whilst one does not wish to gloss over disgraceful conduct or skirt shameful revelations, nothing now

can be gained by dwelling overmuch on the conditions which made this accident so terrible a one. There are, however, certain significant facts which must be spoken of. It may not have escaped the reader's notice that the boats of the *General Slocum* have never been mentioned. They do not enter the narrative, for not a boat was lowered, nor is there any discoverable evidence of any attempt having been made. As for the crew, the whole survived, with the exception of a steward who was loaded down with coin. Doubtless the crew did their best in conditions that might well appal the bravest. Of them the coroner subsequently said, "They were powerless in the panic."

Of acts of downright heroism there were, of course, many. The Carnegie Hero Fund sought out and rewarded those who had risked their lives in saving others, whilst amongst the dead were those who had heroically sacrificed themselves that some companion or relative might live. The band must be mentioned; it continued to play when the ship was blazing until overwhelmed by a rush of panic-stricken humanity.

On June 28th, the coroner's jury found that the disaster was due to the misconduct of the directors of the Knickerbocker Steamship Company. It held that Captain Van Shaick, of the *General Slocum*, and Captain Pease, of the Company's fleet, were criminally responsible, and referred the case of the steamboat inspector, whose duty it was to see that such things as hoses, pumps, lifebelts, and boats were in good order, to the federal authorities.

The latter's commission in due course placed the responsibility upon certain specified officials of the steamboat inspection service for the Second District and for New York, whereupon President Roosevelt gave orders for the removal of the incriminated

persons from their employment and for the thorough investigation of the steamboat inspection service of New York.

But apart from this, and in spite of widespread agitation in America, it cannot be discovered that those upon whom the blame for the disaster had been placed received any punishment whatever save that which their own consciences inflicted upon them.

CHAPTER IX

THE GREAT ROCKALL DISASTER

*Steamer "Norge" belonging to the United Steamship
Co., of Copenhagen
3,318 tons, gross Register
Built 1881, Glasgow
Struck on a reef South of Rockall, North Atlantic
7.45, June 28th, 1904
600 Lost*

"The most diminutive speck of dry land in the shape of an island, islet, or rock, rising out of the sea to be found anywhere in the world at so great a distance from the mainland." In these words an old mariner described Rockall.

Set in the North Atlantic, 150 miles from St. Kilda and 290 miles almost due west of the coast of Ross-shire, the Island of Rockall rises sheer from the sea; its base is barely 250 feet in circumference; its sides are perpendicular except at one point. There, in the greatest loneliness, amidst the breakers of the Atlantic, in a spot where land would never be expected, this strange rock shews its head.

By reason of its shape, it has often been mistaken for a ship under sail. Once a captain stated that when in the neighbourhood in a convoy of three vessels, each master thought a fourth had joined them, and on an earlier occasion one of His Majesty's frigates actually cleared for action and "gave chase", the crew discovering their mistake only when within a mile or two, and being greatly disappointed to find

that what they thought was an enemy ship was nothing but a mass of rock.

Rockall began to appear upon charts in the seventeenth century, but the first record of any landing there is dated July 10th, 1810, when a party from the frigate *Endymion* went upon the rock and very nearly came to grief through the sudden descent of fog. In March, 1892, there appeared in print a most graphic account of Rockall, the writer stating that he had visited the island, and giving surprising ornithological facts about it. This account was later found to be a hoax from start to finish.

It seems probable that in much earlier times there was a very much larger island where now Rockall stands (outpost of the lost *Atlantis* ?) and the surrounding sea is very shallow and dangerous, reefs radiating for several miles. It was upon one of these, Helen's Reef, that the steamer *Norge* came to disaster.

She was a Danish steamer of 3,318 tons gross register, belonging to the United Steamship Company of Copenhagen, employed in the emigrant trade. On June 26th, 1904, she left Christiansund, Norway, for New York, with a crew of 68 and over 600 passengers, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, and Russians, most of the latter of whom had fled from Poland to avoid being drafted into the army and sent to the front at Port Arthur, the Russo-Japanese War being then in progress.

The weather was moderately fine, the passengers were in good spirits, pleased at the idea of having escaped from the hated army drafts and looking forward to a new life in that Eldorado of their dreams, the United States. But before many hours had passed they were to suffer a terrible shipwreck and the sea was to be strewn with hundreds of their dead bodies.

At 7.45, on June 28th, whilst doing between ten

and eleven knots, without any warning whatever, without even a cry from the look-out, the *Norge* struck a sunken reef south of Rockall, no less than twenty-five miles northward of her intended course. "There came a crash," said a survivor. "The ship seemed to stand still for a moment, and then there came that grating, crunching sound which told us plainly what had happened, and struck terror into the hearts of the bravest."

Captain Gundel immediately called for steam astern, his intention being to try and beach the vessel, but, as water was pouring into the forward hold, he took the precaution of ordering the boats to be got ready and lifebelts to be served out to the passengers.

The *Norge* had eight lifeboats and a number of rafts; but it was clear that they could not accommodate her entire company. Nevertheless, there was no panic, and the entire circumstances of this fearful disaster were notable for the heroism displayed by all concerned. There was, of course, an immediate rush for the deck; in it, fathers were divided from their children, husbands from wives, brothers from sisters; but on the whole calm prevailed, and the officers and crew set about placing the women and children in the boats.

But, as is so often the case in conditions such as this, the boats were only launched with difficulty. One was immediately upset, all in it being drowned; another was stove in against the ship's side and sank, a third was cut from the falls when about nineteen feet from the surface, and a fourth only got away in a seriously damaged condition, incessant bailing being necessary to keep her afloat.

The remaining boats were filled and got away, but there was left upon the decks of the sinking ship

a dense mass of human beings, compelled either to fling themselves into the sea in the desperate hope of swimming till assistance came, if ever, or to go down to death as the water now lapped over the deck to their feet, now rose to their knees, and at last, in a raging whirlpool, swept over them as the *Norge* took the final plunge.

Within twenty minutes of striking, the *Norge* went down by the bows, the captain and such officers as were not in command of the boats, remaining at their posts.

The scene that then followed cannot be dwelt on at length. Scores were sucked down instantly, and mercifully, to their death, whilst their less fortunate companions struggled in the waves, exhausting themselves with their despairing cries for aid, some clinging to wreckage, others imploring to be taken into already over-crowded boats, and even offering all they had in the world for an oar on which to rest.

Everything that could be done was done. Many were picked up, including the captain and the 3rd engineer who had been swimming in company for some time; but at last no more could be taken, and those in the boats had to row away from the terrible scene with the mournful death-wail that rose from the sea ringing in their ears.

The first news of this disaster reached the world from Grimsay, Hebrides, on July 3rd, when the trawler *Salvia*, landed twenty-seven survivors. She had come upon the scene of the wreck a few hours later and had picked up such living persons as she could find, making her way, as Captain Miles said, through lanes of wreckage and dead bodies floating in lifebelts that presented a spectacle too horrible to depict.

Immediately on receipt of the news, public

interest in this and such other countries as were not too deeply involved in the hostilities in the Far East shifted to the Hebrides. Twenty-seven survivors out of 668 ! Was that to be all ?

The Danish consul at Stornoway immediately chartered a ship to proceed to the neighbourhood of Rockall and search for boats and rafts, and the Torpedo-gunboat *Leda*, on fishery duty at Shetland, was ordered to comb the sea for the same purpose. Meanwhile, the wires to every Scottish port on the west coast were humming with enquiries for news of other possible survivors.

Then, one by one, the boats came in. That which had picked up Captain Gundel had steered for St. Kilda. On the way a schooner and barque had passed without seeing their signal of distress, but when within sight of St. Kilda the *Energie* of Hamburg, bound from Philadelphia to Stettin, had picked them up. She took them to Stornoway. In this boat were twenty-eight young children and thirteen women, besides men. Two of the children had, however, died, and had been buried at sea.

The boat commanded by the 2nd mate, that which had been cut from the falls, had no compass and very few provisions. Part of her store had been given up to another boat with less, and it was only owing to the skilful handling of the boat by the mate and the gallant conduct of all in her that any survived. Sailing east, they sighted in due course Suleskerry, but the sea was so high that they feared to make a landing. Eventually they were picked up by a Norwegian schooner and landed at Thorshaven, Faroe Islands. There was in the boat a fifteen-months-old child ; it was wrapped in the mate's coat and fed on biscuits which were previously chewed for her by the passengers.

All these survivors suffered terribly from thirst,

and some could not wait their turn when lined up on the schooner's deck, but, breaking rank, drank dirty water which was standing in a bucket outside the galley.

A survivor from another boat said, "Our boat had a great hole knocked in her the moment we launched her. We had to bale every minute, and even then were sitting up to our knees in water. We took it in turns to hold the children. We lost all we had. I had only my shirt and trousers on, and some of the women were only half clothed. The dozens of people who tried to get into the boat was awful."

Eventually five of the six boats which got away from the *Norge* were accounted for. Of the last nothing was ever heard.

The landing of the survivors at various ports resulted in many happy reunions, but also to the raising of many false hopes. Some who trusted to find their lost ones safe at some distant port were doomed to terrible disappointment, whilst others who had given up all hope had their hearts rejoiced when in the depths of despair. Johansen, a survivor, told how he got his sister up from below when the ship struck, set her on a hatch, and went to see if there was room for her in a boat. When he returned she was gone. He was eventually landed at Grimsay, and mourned her for lost until he found that she had been put into a boat by a seaman and was safe at Stornoway. On the other hand, a Russian blacksmith, landed at Stornoway in an exhausted condition, hoped against hope, but eventually died of a broken heart at the loss of his wife and six children.

The total number of survivors was barely a hundred; close on six hundred had lost their lives, and in spite of the daily tales of carnage from the Far East, the world could not but be aghast at the

extent of this disaster. The Danish Government was the recipient of messages of condolence from all quarters ; Queen Victoria sent a message of sympathy to Copenhagen, and the Marine Department of the Board of Trade expressed to the Danish Legation in London its great sympathy, adding its admiration at the gallant conduct displayed by the officers and Crew of the *Norge*.

Then came the question : Who was to blame ? Conflicting statements had already been made. A seaman, the only one in one of the boats, stated that it was foggy and raining, and that they did not see Rockall at all ; but Captain Gundel, before leaving for Copenhagen to attend the enquiry before the Marine and Commercial Court, said that the weather was fine and clear and that " he could not account for being so far out of his reckoning, except by reason of unknown currents."

The Court opened on August 29th, and its decision was given on December 24th. From the evidence given it would appear that the visibility varied. Captain Gundel intended to keep south of Rockall, but the *Norge* had apparently drifted a good deal further north than was reckoned for. Early in the morning of the day of the disaster the atmosphere was clear, and Captain Gundel expected to pass six or seven kilometres to the southward of the rock, at which distance it would, of course, be easily seen. But about 5 a.m. a certain amount of haze having fallen, Captain Gundel gave up the attempt to sight Rockall and changed his course to west-south-west. Two and a half hours later he felt sure that Rockall and its reefs could not longer present any danger and he changed back to his previous course. Shortly afterwards the ship struck.

The Court found that neither the master nor the steamship company could be held responsible for

the disaster ; but it held that Captain Gundel had displayed a certain want of caution in view of the great number of passengers carried by the *Norge*, and he was ordered to pay his own legal expenses at the enquiry.

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERY OF THE *HILDA*

*London & South-Western Railway Co.'s passenger
Steamer*

847 tons gross Register

Built 1882, Glasgow

Ashore Pierres des Portes, St. Malo

About midnight, Nov. 18th, 1905

99 Passengers, 27 Crew lost

A certain mystery attaches to the loss of the *Hilda*. Her master was not only an experienced navigator, but was known to his owners and to many passengers who had voyaged with him frequently as an exceedingly cautious and painstaking man. There was nothing rash or venturesome in his character, and he would no more have taken a chance with fate in circumstances such as attended the loss of the *Hilda* than he would have deliberately driven his ship ashore. And yet the *Hilda* was piled up with severe loss of life. Her master and all the other officers perished, so that there was none left to tell the why or wherefore of the tragedy.

The *Hilda* belonged to the London & South-Western Railway Co. She was a twin-screw steamer of 847 tons gross register, and plied between Southampton and St. Malo. She was under the command of Captain William Gregory, had a crew of 28, and on the occasion of her last voyage carried 24 saloon

passengers and 80 Breton onion-sellers who were returning to their native country after their business season in England.

The *Hilda* left Southampton at 10 p.m. on November 17th, 1905. She should have left at 8.15, but was delayed by fog, which again delayed her when only a short way out. When off Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, the fog was so bad that Captain Gregory came to anchor and remained so until 6 o'clock on the following morning.

The weather was then fine and the voyage was resumed. The *Hilda* passed safely through the Race of Alderney and at 2 p.m. was off Jersey. Then, however, the sky changed, and before long an easterly gale had blown up, accompanied by severe snow squalls and a high sea.

This did not occasion the *Hilda* any distress, and at 6 p.m. the lights of St. Malo were seen—a not unwelcome aspect for the passengers, most of whom, the onion-sellers especially, were sea-sick. The *Hilda* was entering St. Malo by the usual passage, the Chenal de Petite Porte, and soon would have been safely alongside the quay but for the intervention of a severe snowstorm.

When about half a mile from the Jardin light this storm blotted out all lights, wrapping the ship in darkness so impenetrable that Captain Gregory stood out to sea again. Whatever may have been the discomforts of the passengers, they were nothing compared to the peril of trying to enter St. Malo blindfold.

Now comes the mystery. Only one member of the crew of the *Hilda* was saved from the subsequent wreck, and he could throw no light on the matter of her grounding. All that he could say was that about midnight a great shock was felt and that, rushing on deck, he found the *Hilda* on the rocks

and great seas breaking over her. For some reason or another the ship was no longer being kept off the land, but was headed for port. She was considerably to the westward of the correct course, and was jammed into a crevice in the rocks known as the Pierres des Portes.

Events then happened with great rapidity. The passengers were summoned on deck, rockets were sent up, flares burnt, blasts on the steam whistle blown, and the crew ordered to get the boats away.

The *Hilda* carried two lifeboats, two cutters, and two quarter boats, ample for all aboard; but her position prevented use being made of them.

Neither of the two lifeboats nor the port cutter could be lowered because of the closeness of the rocks, and the starboard cutter was caught by the sea the moment she was lowered and was smashed against the ship's side. The crew then turned their attention to the quarter boats, and were in the act of lowering when the *Hilda*, struck by a tremendous sea, broke in two and her stern sank, carrying with it most of the passengers. This occurred only ten minutes after the ship struck.

The only able-seaman saved was James Grinter. He told that a few seconds later another great sea came aboard and swept him into the port main rigging, to which he clung with the chief officer and the cook. The starboard rigging was full of people. The night was very dark, thick snow was falling, and it was bitterly cold.

Clambering up the rigging, Grinter managed to make himself more or less secure by the masthead light, and there he clung desperately on. The other two men were not able to climb so high, and about two hours later the cook dropped off, overcome by the cold and the continual douches of icy spray, and was seen no more.

So the night of agony passed. Snow, an icy gale, stinging spray, and a precarious hold to the rigging of a swaying mast. One by one the figures dropped from the mast to be seized by the seas and battered to pieces against the rocks. Many died in the rigging and were frozen to it. At 6 a.m. the chief officer died. His last words were: "All lost. No one to tell the tale."

About this time, Grinter saw a French fishing boat not far off, but was unable to attract her attention, and it was not until 9.30 that his signals were seen by the *Ada*, a sister ship of the *Hilda*, leaving St. Malo for England.

She and a French pilot cutter sent boats, and the survivors were taken off. Of the 132 souls aboard the *Hilda* when she struck, but six remained, and these could hardly have held out under such terrible conditions for very much longer.

The *Ada* returned to St. Malo, and it was not until she arrived that anyone ashore either in England or France had any idea of the fearful disaster which had occurred that night. Not a rocket had been seen nor a blast from the whistle heard. The *Hilda* had gone ashore and 126 persons had perished, and it was not until the look-out on the bridge of the *Ada* saw Grinter waving his cap from the masthead of the wreck that anyone became aware of the tragedy.

The distress caused by this shipwreck was greatest in Brittany, especially in the Commune of Cleder, where hardly a family had not lost a relative amongst the seventy-five onion-sellers who perished. To aid them and dependents of the crew funds were opened in England and France, and handsome subscriptions were forthcoming to mitigate somewhat the sorrow and misfortune caused by this wreck.

The bodies of many of the lost were never found; others were carried by the sea to St. Cast and Surtain-

ville. The French torpedo-boat destroyer *Lancier* found the body of Captain Gregory off St. Cast. It was brought to England and buried in Southampton Cemetery.

A Court of Enquiry was held in London, and on February 8th, 1906, delivered judgment. An outstanding feature of this enquiry was the number of witnesses who spoke of the extraordinary care invariably taken by Captain Gregory. He had entered the company's service in 1869 as an able-seaman, had risen to command, and had never been censured.

The enquiry did little in determining the cause of the disaster, since there were no witnesses who could make any statements regarding the navigation of the vessel immediately prior to the grounding. The court had to content itself with saying that the cause could "never be definitely known", adding that it "was not inclined to attribute it to neglect or rashness" on the part of Captain Gregory.

There is a sad coincidence to relate in connection with the death of one of the stewardesses of the *Hilda*. When the *Stella* was lost in 1899 a lad named John Hubbard, son of one of the crew, was admitted gratuitously to Reedham Orphanage, Purley, to be maintained until he reached the age of fifteen. His term expired on November 23rd, 1905, five days after his mother, a stewardess, was drowned in the loss of the *Hilda*.

In April, 1906, a monument was erected in the cemetery at Roscoff, Brittany, in memory of the victims of this disaster.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAGEDY OF THE *BERLIN*

Great Eastern Railway Co.'s Passenger Steamer
1,175 tons gross Register
Built 1894, Hull
Stranded on North Pier, Hook of Holland
About 5 a.m., Feb. 21st, 1907
85 Passengers, 48 Crew lost

The tragedy of the *Berlin* is the tragedy of Captain Precious. Here is a man whose whole life has been spent on the North Sea. He knows his lanes through it like the palm of his hand; he has no fear of its hot moods or when it is stealthily ready for a drowning; for years he has treated it with contempt, carrying across it in safety thousands of his fellow-creatures in ships of which he is master. And then, one day, comes an error of judgment, a trifle in other circumstances, but now a blunder that has fearful consequences. Not slow to seize its opportunity, the irreconcilable enemy of ships and men acts instantly, and in a twinkling a stout ship becomes a helpless wreck, to be battered to pieces under a ceaseless rain of the sea's hammer-blows, and Captain Precious and one hundred and twelve other souls die terribly.

There are circumstances which make the stranding of the *Berlin* an exceptionally sad affair. The ship had undergone a terrible buffeting in the North Sea, and her passengers had suffered in consequence.

But the passage was almost over. Within a few minutes they would be at the quay where the more stable train awaited them. Many of them were getting ready to go ashore. Then, at the very entrance to harbour, disaster came, and it was upon the toe of the pier set in the sea as protection to ships that they endured shipwreck and all its agonies.

If this was not enough, so savage was the sea that it defied for thirty-three hours the bravest attempts at rescue, and held within its grasp the ship and her unhappy company till but fifteen souls were left out of a company of one hundred and forty-eight.

The *Berlin* belonged to the Great Eastern Railway Company and plied on the Harwich-Hook of Holland route (105 miles) which was opened in 1893. She was of 1,175 tons gross register, was built in Hull, and was under command of Captain Precious, who had been in the Company's service for thirty-one years. He had entered as ordinary seaman in 1876, had become able-seaman in 1880, and by 1892 had risen to the position of master.

She left Harwich at 10 p.m. on Wednesday, February 20th, 1907, during a period of very bad weather, a gale of great severity from the north-west having been blowing for several days. She made the crossing, however, without incident, had passed the Maas Lightship, where the pilot took charge, and was about to enter the "new waterway", in which, a few minutes later, she would have found full protection from the great seas which were running, and a respite from the buffeting she had received.

The "new waterway" is an artificial channel which was opened to traffic in 1872. It is about four miles in length, leaving the River Maas north of Maasluis, and forming the entrance from the North Sea. The Hook of Holland station is on the right

bank of the waterway about a mile and a half from the entrance. The *Berlin*, therefore, had a very short distance further to go ; in fact, the bugles had already been sounded to inform the crew and passengers that it was almost going-ashore time.

The ship was rolling heavily. And about 5 a.m. as she came almost abreast of the North Pier she was struck by a sea on the port quarter and her head was brought round to the northward. She came round with her helm hard aport, catching the sea on her starboard side, and was driven with tremendous force on to the toe of the North Pier which was driven deep into her amidships. She lay helplessly across it, her starboard side exposed to the full force of the North Sea, and instantly great waves began to break over her.

The news was known in England at 6.35, a cable having been received from the railway company's agent at the Hook of Holland which read :

“*Berlin* stranded at North Pier. Very dangerous. Heavy gale. Tugs and lifeboat going out to assist.”

At 10.36 a further message was received, as follows :

“*Berlin* total loss with crew and passengers. Nobody saved.”

But bad as matters were, they were not quite so bad as this. The plight of the *Berlin* was seen instantly from the shore, and the Dutch lifeboats were manned. But, incredible as it may seem to those who have no first-hand knowledge of the conditions, they were unable to approach the stranded ship. The toe of the North Pier is a breakwater, awash in rough weather, which provides a platform for the beacon ; it tapers off under water, and it

was upon this latter part that the *Berlin* had impaled herself.

The most desperate attempts to establish communication with the ship were made by the lifeboat crews. The lifeboat *President Van Heel*, under the command of Captain Jansen, a hardy and courageous seaman, did everything possible. Three times lines were actually got inboard the *Berlin*, but every time they were broken before a heavier cable could be got across. Once the lifeboat got within ten yards of the wreck, but the tremendous sea at the entrance to the channel beat her off and she was forced to put back, contenting herself with picking up bodies on the way which were taken to the dockyard of the Holland-Amerika Line.

At 7.20 those who were watching from the shore saw that her masts were assuming divergent angles. It was only too clear what was happening. The *Berlin's* back had broken, and she was parting in two. At 7.50 a terrible tragedy was witnessed.

Through the mist of rain and spray and between the squalls of snow which now and then blotted out the whole face of the sea the fore part of the *Berlin* was seen to part from the rest. It was engulfed in a cauldron of foam, and those upon it were overwhelmed in an instant, either to drown in waves against which the strongest swimmer could not hope to fight, or to be battered to pieces against the granite blocks of the pier.

Waves were breaking with pitiless regularity over what remained of the *Berlin*. High over her funnels and bridge they leapt and bore down in cataracts of hissing foam along the deck, snatching one by one the human beings that cowered there in terror. Then the bridge went, and with it went, amongst others, Captain Precious.

The entrance to the waterway was full of wreckage

and bodies, and through the latter the lifeboats made their way, seeking for one life at least to save. And at last they found one man alive. This was Captain G. W. Parkinson, who was on his way to Amsterdam to join his own ship. He was carried overboard by a wave almost immediately after the bridge had gone, but, seizing a piece of wreckage and being luckily carried away from the pier, he was heard shouting by the lifeboatmen, was picked up and taken ashore. It was thought at first that he would prove to be the only survivor of the wreck.

When he had recovered somewhat from his terrible experience he was able to give the first account of what had happened on the ill-fated ship. He was in his cabin when she struck. He put on some clothes and made his way to the bridge, where he told Captain Precious who he was and offered to be of assistance. Captain Precious had ordered the engines full astern and was in hopes of getting the *Berlin* off. Thereupon Captain Parkinson said he would watch the lightship to see if the ship moved under the pull of the engines.

But within a few moments the engines stopped, and the Chief Engineer came on deck followed by his staff. "The stokehold is full of water," he reported. "The fires are out and I can do no more."

Captain Precious then ordered his officers to get lifebelts on to all the passengers and crew, shouted to those within reach of his voice that if the lifeboats came they were not to forget that the women must go first, and began to fire rockets and flares.

He had little opportunity to say or do more. The sea was sweeping the deck continually and smashing with tremendous force against every obstacle in its path. Within half an hour of the stranding the lifeboats had been pounded to matchwood, and then the bridge and Captain Precious went.

Meanwhile Captain Parkinson had noticed the deck breaking up, and that the fore part of the vessel was in danger of parting from the rest. He shouted to his 2nd officer, who was accompanying him, and to the passengers to come aft. Some did so, but those who lingered lost their lives. Within two minutes of Captain Parkinson's warning cry the fore part broke away and was swept into the channel, carrying with it about a hundred persons, all of whom lost their lives.

In addition to the lifeboats there was another close witness of the tragedy. About an hour behind the *Berlin* had come the railway company's cargo-steamer *Clacton*, and the first thing she saw on arrival at the entrance to the waterway, about 6.35, was the stranded *Berlin* being pounded by the sea. She came round and attempted to launch a boat to go to the help of the *Berlin* and, later, to pick up Captain Parkinson, who could be seen struggling in the sea, but was prevented by the violence of the storm. From her decks could be seen the agonies of the survivors in the *Berlin*. Some were holding on desperately to the twisted davits and shouting for help. Their cries could be heard. Others were huddled together on the lee side, striving to protect themselves from the battering of the seas which streamed aboard. The *Clacton* stood by for some time without having any chance of rendering assistance and then lay-to outside. A sad feature of this incident was that, working as able-seaman in her, was J. W. Precious, son of the master of the *Berlin*.

There were other ships, too, close to the *Berlin*. The shipping from the Hook of Holland was carrying on in spite of the gale, and as they went in and out they had to pass near the North Pier, and those aboard the *Berlin* could see their happier fellows go

by whilst the sea prevented a single helping hand from reaching them.

All that day and the following night the gale raged with unbroken severity. Lifeboats and the tug *Hellevoetsilius*, with Prince Henry of the Netherlands aboard, stood by, waiting the first opportunity of making a rescue; but their first chance did not come until 1.30 p.m. on February 22nd. The gale was still severe, and snow squalls still swept down over the sea at intervals, but the waves had moderated a little and the tide was low.

A boat manned by pilots' apprentices was lowered from the *Hellevoetsilius* and was towed by a lifeboat as far as the beacon on the North Pier. Spectators from the shore watched the attempt with growing excitement, though now and then the snow blotted out all view of the wreck. But when one squall had cleared away it was seen that the boat's crew had succeeded in landing on the pier, which was now not under water, and that six of them were mounting the iron frame-work of the light-tower. Through glasses the survivors on the wreck could be seen eagerly watching the attempt at rescue as they huddled in the lee of the smoke-room, their only shelter against the awful weather. From the light-tower ropes were thrown towards the *Berlin*, but after repeated efforts to reach her had failed, at last one of the rescuers managed to seize the end of a boat's fall which was hanging down from the *Berlin's* side. Communication with the wreck had at length been established.

No sooner had this end been made fast than a figure was seen to slide down the falls. It was one of the seamen of the *Berlin* who, after vainly trying to induce one or two women passengers to go first, went down to shew them the way to safety. His example was followed, and at last the lifeboat re-

turned with eight survivors. Her crew reported that there were still three women on the wreck who were too exhausted with cold and fatigue to save themselves.

Again the lifeboats attempted to reach the wreck, but the tide rising and the gale continuing, they were unable to approach. Waves were still breaking clean over the portion of the wreck that remained.

But the three women were rescued, and it was to the action of a private individual that they owed their lives. That night between 1 and 2 a.m., Captain M. Sperling, of Dordrecht, with his two nephews and a friend, having made arrangements with the owner of the tug *Wodan*, was taken out to the end of the pier, towing a flat-bottomed yawl. Captain Sperling got into the yawl and moored it to the beacon, and, getting on to the pier, clambered up the rope by which the previous rescues had been made, being thereby the first man to make his way aboard the *Berlin* since she struck.

There he found the three women. They were still alive, but were unable through exhaustion and frost-bite to do anything for themselves. One by one, Captain Sperling carried them to the rail and, lashing ropes round them, lowered them to the pier, each being bound to the framework of the beacon whilst he went back for the next. Eventually he got the women into the yawl and thence to the tug. They were taken to the Hotel Amerika and put to bed, it being shortly afterwards announced that though they had suffered terribly they were getting on as well as could be expected.

There were no further survivors of the wreck, and though the death-roll was never definitely established the subsequent Court of Enquiry found that in its opinion 85 passengers and 48 of the crew, including all the certificated officers, were lost.

The survivors had terrible tales to tell of their sufferings, and spoke of the fearful hours of anguish whilst they watched the efforts which were being made to rescue them. Most of them had their hands and feet frost-bitten. They said that the officers had done all that could be done, that they behaved calmly and courageously, that there was no panic, and that certain members of the crew had lost their lives in attempting to go below and find food and water for the passengers. A saloon steward, W. C. Carter, who happily survived, was specially mentioned. He went below with two others on this errand and both of his companions were drowned below decks. The body of Chief Steward Moore was subsequently picked up with the body of a little girl, who had been placed in his care for the voyage, in his arms.

When at last the sea moderated and the wreck could be examined, some idea of the ferocity of the sea could be gathered. Water had burst into all the cabins and smashed the furniture to pieces. The ship had been continually pounded on to the toe of the pier, every sea hitting her on the starboard side smashing her over to the head of the pier and letting her fall back with her full weight on to the piles beneath her.

Great appreciation of the efforts made by the Dutch lifeboatmen and Captain Sperling was expressed in the Netherlands and England. Gold medals of the Order of the House of Orange were presented by Prince Henry to Captains Berckhout, Jansen, and Sperling, and silver medals of the Order to their crews. On the occasion of a performance given at the Palace Theatre, London, in aid of the widows and orphans of the crew of the *Berlin*, gold medals, specially struck, were also presented to the three captains, and they had been given a rousing reception at Liverpool-street Station by a great

multitude when they arrived in London to attend the performance. Captains Jansen and Sperling also received the silver medals of Lloyd's Society.

The Court of Enquiry found that the loss of the *Berlin* was due to an error of judgment on the part of her master in attempting to enter the new waterway during a heavy north-westerly gale, and failing to make sufficient allowance for the strength of the tide, wind, and sea.

CHAPTER XII

WIRELESS PROVES ITS WORTH

Oceanic Steam Navigation Co.'s liner " Republic "
(White Star)

15,378 tons gross Register

Built 1903

Sunk after collision 20 miles South of Nantucket
5.30 a.m., Jan. 23rd, 1909

The sinking of the *Republic* ranks high in dramas of the sea, and is especially worthy of note as being the first shipwreck in which wireless played an important part. Ships had been fitted with wireless apparatus for some time before this occurrence, but nothing had so far occurred to prove to ship owners and masters the full extent of its value in the saving of life, or to fire the popular imagination with enthusiasm for a great scientific discovery.

The affair, too, marked the opening of a new epoch in the history of news dissemination. It brought home to people who ordinarily are not unduly interested in events beyond their own immediate horizons something of the drama of life over the curve of the earth. Not only did wireless play its part in aiding stricken ships and saving life, but the whole civilised world was kept acquainted with the acts and scenes in the drama as they were actually happening, and he who bought the numerous editions of the daily newspapers as they came on the streets was able to follow hour by hour the sequence of

events, with all their doubts, fears, hopes, suspense, and eventual triumph almost as closely as if he watched them happening before his eyes.

The *Republic*, Captain Sealby, was a ship of 15,378 tons gross displacement, belonging to the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company of Liverpool (The White Star Line). She had on board 250 first-class passengers, 211 steerage, and a crew of 300. She left New York on January 22nd, 1909, for a winter cruise in the Mediterranean, but almost immediately ran into thick fog which descended over a wide area of the North Atlantic. Speed was reduced and all the usual precautions taken for safe navigation in what is undoubtedly one of the gravest dangers to be faced at sea.

But in spite of this, a collision occurred. At 5.30 on the morning of the 23rd, when 175 miles east of the Ambrose Light, another steamer was heard in the vicinity, and, with but a few seconds' warning, and almost simultaneously with the cry of the lookout, she loomed up out of the fog and crashed into the *Republic's* side. The impact was terrific. The *Republic* was cut down to the water-line, and the sea began to pour in. The passengers, of whom three were killed and several injured, were asleep when the crash came, but, roused from their bunks, ran on deck in their night clothes, expecting the ship to sink immediately. There was, however, no panic.

Conditions below were grave. Within ten minutes of the collision the engine-room was full of water up to the top of the cylinders, and it was obvious that the ship was in great peril. There was risk too that the boilers might explode, but in spite of the risk they ran the engine-room staff to a man stuck to their posts, closing the bulkhead doors and opening the steam valves, one of the men actually assisting in this work up to his neck in water. It is undoubtedly

due to the prompt action taken by the engineers and firemen that the *Republic* stayed afloat as long as she did.

Meanwhile, in another part of the ship other and novel efforts were being made for the safety of the cargo of souls which she carried. Immediately after the impact, Captain Sealby gave orders for preparations to be made for the abandoning of the ship, and he also ordered his wireless operator to send out a call for aid. When the *Republic* was struck, the wireless cabin had been severely damaged, but the apparatus and aerial were safe, and though the dynamos had stopped, incidentally plunging the ship into darkness, the accumulators were unhurt, and wireless messages could be sent. Amidst the wreckage of the wireless cabin sat Jack Binns, a man whose name has taken its place in the history of the sea and become a household word on land.

Binns immediately began to send out the C.Q.D., the distress signal which gave place to the S.O.S. and got in touch with the wireless station at Siasconcett on the America coast. Siasconcett thereupon sent out to such ships as were within reach news of the disaster and gave the *Republic's* position, whilst within a few minutes the world in general became aware of an occurrence of which, only a few years previously, it would not have heard until long after it was all over for good or ill.

The vessel which had struck the *Republic* was the Italian steamer *Florida*, of 5,018 tons, bound from Naples to New York with 800 emigrants aboard. There was more consternation in her than in the *Republic*. The passengers were mostly refugees from a great earthquake which had recently occurred in Italy, and their nerves had already been severely shaken by their terrible experiences. However, the officers were able to calm their fears for the time,

and to reassure them that there was no immediate danger of the ship going down.

Her master, Captain Ruspini, got into touch with the *Republic* by wireless and agreed with Captain Sealby that, considering the state of the latter vessel, a transfer of passengers to his ship should be made, for it was feared that vessels which were now known to be seeking them might be delayed by the fog and not arrive in time.

Whilst the transfer was being made, and this was no easy matter in fog with a comparatively high sea running, Binns was still at his post, keeping in touch with Siasconcett. His spark was too weak to reach other vessels, but he was able to overhear them talking, and to report to Captain Sealby that the *New York*, the *Lorraine*, the *Furnessia*, the *Lucania*, and the *Baltic* were all aware of what had happened, and were striving to grope their way to his assistance.

The *Baltic*, Captain Ransom, picked up Siasconcett's message at 6 o'clock in the morning, within half an hour of the collision, and though he had passed Nantucket inward bound, Captain Ransom turned his ship and steamed back towards the scene of the disaster.

Conditions were not easy for him, and though the distance was not great, enshrouded in fog as he was, he could not at first locate the *Republic*. The latter's spark was too weak to reach the *Baltic* direct, but Binns could hear that vessel talking with the shore, and it was undoubtedly a nerve-racking experience to witness, as it were, the groping in the fog of the would-be rescuer, whilst hours passed and the ship sank slowly beneath his feet.

However, Binns presently began to get the *Baltic's* signals direct, and he was kept busy notifying her of his position and exchanging signals. In the afternoon he got in touch with the *Lorraine*, but she could

not find him, and it was the *Baltic* that between 6 and 7 in the evening eventually arrived on the scene.

Binns, who had been busy at the key without a break since the collision—he sent out in all over 200 messages—now had the task of directing the course of the *Baltic* as she manoeuvred for position. Whilst the lights of this vessel could be seen from the *Republic*, the latter, since her electric plant had failed, was more or less enshrouded in darkness, her oil lamps barely penetrating the fog more than a few yards. “Now you are on the port bow,”—“Now you are dead ahead,”—“You are coming too close,”—“Back away or you will ram us,” these were the vital messages which the wireless conveyed from one ship’s master to the other.

Eventually, the officers of the *Republic* saw a green light shewing through the fog. The *Baltic* had safely arrived; her great search was over.

The sea had risen, but it was decided that the best course would be to take off the passengers of both vessels from the *Florida*, those of the *Republic* going first. The fact that they were to go in this order appears to have had a bad effect on some of the Italians aboard the *Florida*. There was no great panic, but it was due to the second steward of the *Republic*, a man named Spencer, that it was no worse. Soon after the transfer had started a number of immigrants made a rush for the boats, brushing women and children aside. Spencer, a small man, jumped in amongst them and knocked down man after man, and then announced through the interpreter that he would throw the first man who misbehaved overboard. Thereupon order was restored.

The transfer went on all night until 8 o’clock in the morning, this difficult and hazardous undertaking

being carried out without accident or the loss of a single life. The *Baltic* then resumed her voyage to New York.

The *Republic* was still afloat, and Captain Sealby decided to make an effort to save his vessel. Calling for volunteers, he obtained a crew, which included Binns, and he returned to the bridge of the *Republic*, where his first order was to his wireless operator to call for tugs.

News of the disaster had already been picked up along the coast, and there had started a great race on the part of tugs and other vessels to be first to reach the sinking ship, for she presented an unusual chance of rich salvage. The "winners" were the revenue cutter *Gresham* and the derelict-destroyer *Seneca*, who took the vessel in tow, being convoyed by the *Furnessia*. But when south of Martha's Vineyard Island, it was seen that the *Republic* was sinking rapidly. Boats from the towing vessels were immediately got out, but the *Republic* suddenly plunged down stern first, and the greater part of the crew had to throw themselves into the water to avoid being sucked down in the vortex. Captain Sealby, however, remained with his ship. Searchlights from the others revealed him swarming up the foremast, and to this he clung until the topmast disappeared beneath the water. Happily he and all the members of the crew were picked up without loss.

Meanwhile, the *Baltic* had docked in New York at noon on the 25th, a great crowd witnessing the arrival of the passengers, who were noticed to be shewing very little signs of their distressing experience, and giving Captain Ransom a rousing reception.

But enthusiastic as these scenes were, they were nothing to those enacted when Captain Sealby and Binns arrived. They were seized by a crowd of seamen and stewards of the White Star Line, who

were mad with joy. Perched on the shoulders of stalwarts of the black squad, they were carried out into the streets and shewn to cheering crowds before being deposited in the steamship company's offices. Much the same thing happened to Captain Ruspini, of the *Florida*, who succeeded in bringing his ship safely into dock. The world had been worked up to a high pitch of enthusiasm through the peep behind the scenes, as it were, granted by the use of wireless. Not only had the public mind been fired with the always fascinating details of shipwreck, but the fact that nearly a thousand lives had been snatched from the jaws of death by entirely novel means gripped its imagination.

The same thing happened when the *Baltic* landed Captain Sealby and Binns at Liverpool on February 8th. The wireless operator was literally mobbed, and when he returned to his native city of Peterborough, thousands welcomed him as the hero of the day. He was greeted by the Mayor, who presented him with an address praising him for the coolness and promptitude with which he had used the wireless apparatus. In answer he made a modest speech, stating that he did nothing more than his duty, and gave full credit to the engine-room staff for the part they had played in saving the ship.

The directors of Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co. held a reception in London at which Binns was presented with a gold watch by Mr. Marconi in person, and was congratulated on being the first to shew what wireless could do in saving life at sea.

In acknowledgement of his extraordinary exertions in saving life, Captain Ransom was given a silver medal by Lloyd's, and a valuable piece of plate by the owners of the White Star Line "as a mark of their appreciation of the fine seamanship and resourcefulness displayed by him under very

trying conditions when rendering assistance after collision."

There now remain but two things to mention. We must not forget that there was another wireless operator who did his duty on this occasion, namely, H. G. Tattersall, of the *Florida*, who remained at his post for fifty-two hours without sleep, helping in the work of calling for assistance and directing the course of the *Baltic*. Nor must we overlook the fact that the ships were able to fix their positions with the aid of the submarine bell of the Nantucket Lightship, and that the *Baltic* was also guided by the submarine bell of the Ambrose Lightship, which was heard no less than sixteen miles away.

CHAPTER XIII

- THE SOLE SURVIVOR

*Steamer "General Chanzy," belonging to Compagnie
Générale Transatlantique*

2,257 tons gross Register

Built 1891, Penhoët

Wrecked on North West coast of Minorca

About 8 a.m., Feb. 10th, 1910

87 Passengers, 72 Crew lost

A few hours after dawn on February 11th, 1910, the inhabitants of a little village near Ciudadela, Minorca, were surprised to see approaching them a strange and unkempt figure. With staggering foot-steps, making his way painfully along, there came towards them a young man. His clothes were torn and dripping wet, his face was haggard and encrusted with salt, his hands and feet were bleeding. He was clearly on the verge of collapse, yet, kept upon his feet by an indomitable will, he came slowly towards the cluster of houses.

Who was this wild-looking stranger? Whence had he come? The villagers crowded round him, asking questions. His tongue was strange, but he answered in signs, pointing first towards the sea, then towards himself, and holding up one finger. Not slow to grasp his meaning, the villagers took him to a house and gave him food and clothing; then they set out for the seashore, distant about an hour's walk. The stranger had come from the sea; there

had been shipwreck, and the single finger the stranger raised told them that as far as he knew he alone survived.

Whilst the stranger was being looked after, a party set out for the shore, and there they met with evidence of a great wreck. No ship's gaunt carcass was visible upon the fangs of rock with which Minorca is surrounded, but the shore was littered with wreckage—broken timbers, barrels, crates, spars, lifebelts, deck-chairs, stove-in boats, and ship's fittings of all descriptions—and amongst this wrack were countless bodies. The villagers turned their attentions to the latter first; but though they dragged up from the shore scores of bodies and plunged into the breakers to snatch out those that were floating there, they found no life. Whatever ship it was that had gone down, she had taken all save the young man who had succeeded in making his way amongst them.

Meanwhile, this survivor had recovered his strength somewhat. He was taken in a carriage to Ciudadela, first to a magistrate and later to the French consular agent. He was a Frenchman, by name Marcel Radez, twenty-three years old, the sole survivor of the wreck of the *General Chanzy*, of which disaster he had a remarkable story to tell.

The *General Chanzy*, Captain Cayol, owned by the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, left Marseilles for Algiers at 1 o'clock on Wednesday, February 9th, 1910, with 88 passengers and a crew of 72. A high wind was blowing, and very soon after leaving port a gale of exceptional severity, described as one of the worst in the memory of that generation in the Mediterranean, came up. So bad was it that many vessels were forced to seek shelter, and several which had left Marseilles returned. Captain Cayol was known for his excessive caution. One of his favourite sayings was, "I have eight children waiting for me,

and I do not want to run the risk of sinking for the sake of gaining an hour." He had, however, on this occasion gone too far to turn back, possibly because the wind was from the north, and the *General Chanzy* ploughed her way into an ever-increasing sea, terribly buffeted, constantly swept from end to end, but in no great peril as long as she was on her course.

But, unhappily, the *General Chanzy* was driven off her course during the night of the 9th, and in the morning of the 10th she struck on a reef off the north-west coast of Minorca.

Marcel Radez told that about 8 a.m. he was awakened by a violent shock. Leaping out of his bunk, he called out to a sailor, asking what was the matter. The answer was, "It is nothing." Radez did not believe this, and with several other passengers rushed on deck. There a fearful sight met his eyes. The vessel was not moving ahead at all; she was lying inert whilst giant combers broke over her in constant succession, sweeping her from stem to stern, stripping the decks of all loose gear, and smashing with tremendous force against her upper structures. And from below came a continual crash and grind of plates as the rocks were hammered into her with every blow of the waves that struck her.

Within a minute of Radez's going on deck a wave carried away the bridge and a number of passengers who were clinging to it, and it was only by hanging on to a ring in the mast that he prevented himself being also swept away.

But Radez was a strong swimmer. He could see land not many yards away to leeward, and he made the great resolve of trying to reach it, since the steamer was breaking up fast and was doomed to destruction. A few seconds after the bridge had gone he saw another great wave about to break over the steamer, and as it came aboard he let himself go,

being swept clear of the wreck into the sea. He instantly struck out, and had not swum more than a few strokes before he heard behind him the sound of a violent explosion, more terrible even than the ceaseless shriek of the wind and thunder of the seas. The boilers of the *General Chanzy* had burst, and casks, crates, and wreckage flew over his head "like cannon balls."

He was not injured by these missiles, and another wave, rushing down upon him, seized him in its grasp and flung him, battered, cut, but safe, upon a rock.

Here he clung desperately, and when he had somewhat recovered his strength, clambered to the top out of reach of the waves and turned to look for the ship. She had disappeared, and only a welter of foam marked the spot where she had struck.

For some hours Radez clung to this rock, exposed to the full blast of the terrific tempest, constantly drenched with spray, now and then receiving stunning blows from the sea which, seeming to have repented of flinging him to safety, strove eagerly to regain its prey. And all the time wreckage and bodies came floating past in the foam that hissed and snarled about his feet.

Eventually the wind moderated a little, and this enabled Radez to leave his rock and run for a small cave which he had observed in the main cliff. This gave him some protection from the rain and spray, and he guarded the entrance against the inrush of waves with timbers washed up from the wreck. The wreck, too, provided him with food, for on a tiny beach near the entrance to the cave Radez picked up a case of potatoes with which he sustained life.

For the whole of that day and the following night Radez remained in the cave. At dawn on the 11th, however, the sea had moderated still more, and the

captive ventured to make a bid for freedom by scaling the cliff.

This undertaking was in itself an adventure of no little peril ; coming on top of his other experiences, it was a feat that only the strongest could have dared to attempt. The cliffs were 150 feet high. Nevertheless, Radez essayed to scale them and succeeded, arriving at last safely on dry turf and being rewarded for his courage by seeing not far off the smoke rising from the houses of a small village.

Radez was, as he suspected, the sole survivor of the wreck of the *General Chanzy*. With her had gone down 87 passengers and 72 officers and crew, amongst the former being several English, French, and American theatrical artists who were on their way to fulfil contracts in Algiers. It was conjectured that the storm had swept the steamer out of her course on to the dangerous coast of Minorca, and that her boilers, being flooded by the seas that broke over her, had burst, blowing her to pieces.

There were at first hopes that others had succeeded in clinging to pieces of wreckage or, washed ashore, had found refuge in coves, and destroyers were sent to search. But for some days the storm was still so great that the shore could not be properly combed, and none other than Marcel Radez was ever found alive.

In connection with this marvellous escape a dramatic scene occurred in Paris. When the news of the wreck was circulated throughout France a crowd of relatives of passengers besieged the offices of the steamship company, and amongst them was the grandfather of Radez, a retired gendarme of Noisy le Sec. The sight of the old man inquiring for a passenger was so pathetic that the officials did not at first like to tell him the full extent of the disaster. But at last one of them caught the name

‘Radez’ and exclaimed, “Why, your grandson is the only person saved.”

And also in connection with this wreck was an authentic case of premonition of disaster. Mme. Joly-Velice, who was on her way to Algiers with her husband, had booked her passage, but had so strong a presentiment of shipwreck that she begged her husband to wait for the next steamer. M. Joly-Velice went down to the steamer to make the necessary arrangements, but learnt that their luggage was aboard and in the bottom of the hold, where it could not be got at. His wife therefore reluctantly consented to embark, and both were lost.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ILL-LUCK OF THE *PREUSSEN*

*Five-Masted Full-Rigged Ship, belonging to F.
Laiez, of Hamburg
5,081 tons gross Register
Built 1902, Geestemunde
Ashore after Collision
Fan's Bay, Dover
Nov. 6th, 1910*

The largest sailing-ship in the world and the only five-masted full-rigged ship in existence, a glorious ship, "steadfast and valiant", as Conrad would say, carrying a spread of canvas twice as large as that of any British sailing-ship—so was the *Preussen*, Captain Nissen, as she came down Channel on November 5th, 1910, bound for West Africa.

Carrying a lower yard, upper and lower topsail yards, upper and lower topgallant yards, and royal yard, and having besides her square sails fifteen fore and aft sails, the *Preussen*, of 5,081 tons gross register, belonging to Herr F. Laiez, of Hamburg, was the pride of her owner and her country, and a thing of beauty to all, sailormen or landsmen, who cast eyes upon her. Two days later she was to lie, a helpless wreck with a broken back, on the rocks of Fan's Bay, Dover.

Shall we say that the *Preussen* was out of luck, or that the "unfathomable cruelty of the deep" had picked upon this presumptuous ship, intending to destroy her, despite the most valiant and desperate

actions of men? The fatalist would say that the *Preussen's* time had come, and go she must.

She was on a voyage from Hamburg to the west coast of Africa; her cargo consisted of several tons of sugar, cement, railway metals, bricks, and 100 pianos, amounting to about 10,000 tons in all. Her crew numbered 48.

Early on Sunday morning, November 6th, in bad weather with a high sea and haze, the *Preussen* came into collision with the Brighton Railway Co.'s cross-channel steamer *Brighton*, about eight miles south-south-east of Newhaven, the latter vessel having left that port at 11 p.m. on Saturday with eighty passengers and mails aboard.

The crash was a severe one. The *Preussen's* jibboom was carried away, part of her top-hamper came down, and water began to pour into the forehold. The *Brighton* also suffered badly. Her forward funnel and her mainmast came down, the rail, boats, and bulwarks on the port side were carried away, and the hull was damaged abaft the engine-room. She returned immediately to Newhaven.

The *Preussen* made for the shelter of Dungeness and came to anchor, the crew manning the pumps and striving desperately to make headway against the inrush of water. But the wind had increased and was now blowing a full gale. First her starboard anchor went, then the port, and she was driven out of the anchorage into a wild and ever-increasing sea.

But bad as her condition was, it was by no means yet hopeless. Tugs were standing by, and these successfully picking her up, began to tow her to Dover. She was destined never to reach the shelter of that port. Her luck was out. Whilst not many miles away the towing hawsers parted, and before the tugs could pick her up again the *Preussen* was driven ashore at Fan's Bay, midway between St.

Margaret's and Dover. She struck heavily; down came her steel foremast and spars in a mass of wreckage, from which the crew had a remarkable escape, and she began to pound heavily on the rocks, while sea after sea broke violently over her.

News of the wreck soon reached Dover and the local coastguard stations, and in answer the Dover lifeboat with the tug *Lady Vita* went out and the rocket apparatuses were manned.

The lifeboat encountered a terrific sea, being tossed about like a cork in a whirlpool, and the crew had the greatest difficulty in preventing themselves being washed overboard. They succeeded, however, in manoeuvring their boat within a comparatively short distance of the *Preussen*, but could get no response to signals, though they could see lights burning in the deckhouses and other parts of the vessel. Their situation was, however, so grave—twice they narrowly escaped being capsized—that they were compelled to shew a flare to the tug and be towed home.

Meanwhile, the St. Margaret's coastguards were attempting to send a line by rocket to the *Preussen*. She lay in a position which made this operation extremely difficult from the top of the cliff, and eventually it was decided that they might do better from the shore. Accordingly, Coastguard Hughes had a rope-ladder put down the face of the cliff and he essayed the extremely hazardous feat of a descent to make preparations for the lowering of the rocket apparatus. But as he was doing so a rocket was fired from a neighbouring point which took a line over the wreck's main rigging. There was at first some mystery about this rocket, but it was later learnt that it had been fired by the East Cliff coastguards.

Hughes then found that the conditions were too

bad for him to return to the cliff by ladder, and he had to make his way along the foreshore for about a mile and ascend by means of a zigzag path.

Communication had now been established with the wreck in case of need, but the crew, who in the light of dawn could be seen on her deck, made no sign of desiring to leave their ship.

At 11 o'clock, however, the *Preussen* fired rockets asking for help, and again the Dover lifeboat and the *Lady Vita* went out. On this occasion an attempt was made by the lifeboat to get between the wreck and the shore, but conditions were so bad that this had to be abandoned. The boat did succeed in getting in close enough to offer to take the crew off, but, for some reason, this offer was refused.

It was apparently Captain Nissen's intention to be towed off if he possibly could. And there was no lack of tugs, no less than twelve standing by ready to undertake the salvage as soon as they could get in close enough. But the lee shore and the weather were against them, the proximity of the rocks and the fury of the sea making it too dangerous even for the hardy and adventurous tug crews to get in close enough for cables to be passed.

Eventually they went home, leaving the coastguards to stand by ready to rescue the crew should the *Preussen* begin to break up, whilst an increasing throng of spectators lined the cliffs, looking down on the wreck, whose crew gave yet no sign of desiring to leave.

On Tuesday, sea conditions were better, and on this day a galley reached the wreck, taking off two passengers—a marine painter, Herr Fulm, and Dr. Budzier, an instructor at the navigation school at Rostock—and 18 of the crew. The former were transferred to the German salvage steamer *Albatross* and were taken to Dover,

The galley also took to the *Preussen* a telegram. It was from a personage with a fondness for telegrams, the Kaiser himself, and it expressed to Captain Nissen the All-Highest's sorrow at the loss of a fine German vessel and his admiration at the part played by the crew.

The *Preussen* indeed was never to grace the mercantile marine of the Kaiser again. She had shifted during the night to the eastward where the rocks were worse; she had now twenty feet of water in her holds, and it was thought that her back was broken. On Wednesday, the 9th, there arrived at Dover a number of German lighters for salvage work in conjunction with the *Albatross*, and on the 10th the German underwriters decided to abandon the hull and save as much of the cargo as possible.

Those of the crew who had left having gone back to their ship, this work was put in hand at once, and the *Preussen* began to be stripped of her steel spars, fittings, sails, etc. But the sea was not disposed to let the *Preussen* rest even now. The wind again rose to gale force, compelling the *Albatross* to stop work as she could not approach the wreck, and the entire crew having been taken off, the *Preussen* was left to the mercy of the rocks and sea. They have not dealt lightly with her, and to-day at low tide can be seen a few ribs of the wreck—all that remains of what was once the greatest sailing-ship in the world.

CHAPTER XV

THE TRAGEDY OF ERRORS

Peninsula & Oriental Steam Navigation Co.'s Liner
"Oceana"

6,610 tons gross Register

Built 1888, Belfast

Sunk after Collision

Morning of Mar. 16th, 1912, off Beachy Head

7 Passengers, 11 Crew lost

Landsmen very often express surprise that collisions can occur at sea in clear weather, saying that they cannot understand how, with the space available in even comparatively narrow waters, two vessels cannot keep clear of one another.

Probably in their minds they are comparing the sea with the roads, ships with their cars, knowing that in their own cases collisions are due to blind corners, narrow roads, slippery surfaces, and unexpected eventualities of one sort or another; whereas at sea, as they say, other vessels can be observed miles off, and there must be, not seconds as in the case of cars on the road, but considerable time in which to alter course and go harmlessly by.

It is probably forgotten, however, that ships are not directed across the surface of the sea between curbs or hedges, that although there are no cross-roads or masked side-turnings, there are 32 points to the compass, and that ships can approach one another from any angle at any time. In fact, the

whole sea is to be regarded as a dangerous cross-roads anywhere at any time. In addition, the space apparently available for manoeuvre is greatly diminished by the room needed for turning or stopping, the latter of which operations may take up a mile or more, the deadweight of several thousands of tons moving at, say, twenty miles an hour not being checked as easily as is a car with servo-motor brakes.

These things may seem elementary ; nevertheless, that they have to be taken seriously into consideration is shewn by the fact that collisions in clear weather do occur, and sometimes when it would seem the easiest thing in the world to avoid them. Here is an example.

The P. & O. Liner *Oceana*, Captain T. H. Hyde, R.N.R., Tilbury for Bombay, with 40 passengers and a crew of 220, was proceeding down Channel on the morning of Saturday, March 16th, 1912, the pilot, Mr. T. Penny, being still aboard. The dawn had not yet come, but the weather was clear, and there was no difficulty in seeing lights at a distance.

The pilot, who had been on duty for many hours, was in the chart house, the chief officer and 2nd officer were on the bridge. Just before 4 o'clock the lights of a large sailing-ship were observed, and, a short while later, as the vessels were coming very close, the chief officer of the *Oceana* gave the order to port the helm. At that moment the pilot came on the bridge and asked the chief officer to whom he was porting. The answer was : " To a vessel shewing a flare."

Mr. Penny then saw the sailing-ship at a very short distance and instantly gave the order : " Hard aport ! "

It was, however, too late, and within two or three minutes the ships collided with great violence. The *Oceana* was struck a tremendous blow, and as the

two vessels came together tongues of flame leapt along their sides as steel met steel. The sailing-ship's bowsprit swept along the liner's side, smashing everything in its path, whilst her bows tore a hole in her forty-five feet long, extending below the water-line, through which the sea poured.

The sailing-ship was the German 4-masted steel barque *Pisagua*, 2,850 tons, from Mexillones for Hamburg with nitrate, owned by F. Laeisz, who also owned the *Preussen*, which had become a total loss a few miles from the same spot two years before (see page 115).

After the collision the two ships gradually drew apart, the *Pisagua*, with her foretopmast down and her bows stove in, drifting helplessly away to leeward.

Captain Hyde, having come on the bridge on hearing the orders for the alteration of course, immediately commanded the *Oceana* to be stopped and the boats to be swung out. All hands were ordered to stations, the water-tight doors were closed, rockets were sent up, flares lit, guns fired, and steps were taken for dealing with the safety of the passengers.

No one realises more fully than the present writer how easy it is to sit in a chair at home and say what should or should not have been done during a given emergency at sea. The occurrence is over; one knows what the eventualities were; one has, in fact, a true perspective of the matter and knows maybe that certain steps, taken in the firm belief that they were for the best, were absolutely wrong. But before presuming to condemn such actions it is well to wipe from one's mind all knowledge of what happened later, and in imagination place oneself amidst the conditions as they were then thought to be.

We are aware now that lives lost in this disaster need never have been seriously jeopardised, and that

there is every probability that the ship herself would have been saved had different steps been taken. But who knows what we who sit here safely would have done during the early hours of that dawn with a sinking ship beneath our feet, the load of a great responsibility on our shoulders, and a great anxiety eating at our hearts?

At the crash of impact the passengers rushed on deck, some of them having to wade through water to do so. They were terrified, and their fears were not allayed by the Lascars, of whom there were 153 amongst the crew, who set up a "continuous, weird, and ear-splitting shriek." The latter were, however, kept in hand, and there was no panic of any description.

But there seems to have been a general impression in the *Oceana* that she was sinking rapidly and likely to take the final plunge at any minute, and there was some confusion as to what orders had been given. The master had ordered the boats to be swung out. Apparently this was taken to be an order for them to be lowered, and the passengers, who had been mustered in the music-room in an orderly fashion, were taken so many at a time and put into the boats.

Promptness, usually so commendable in circumstances of this nature, had, however, in this case a disastrous result. No. 1 boat was lowered with 8 passengers and 13 of the crew. But when she reached the water she could not be freed from the falls, and the fact that the liner still had way on her caused the boat to upset. Cries from the water were heard, and the "accident boat" was lowered under the command of the 3rd officer to search for and pick up those struggling in the waves. In this boat were seventeen persons, and she was not, therefore, as handy as she might have been. She picked

up but one survivor from No. 1 boat, a Miss Macfarlane, and then proceeded towards the shore.

The lady's adventure was a terrifying one. She said that there was no confusion on deck after the collision. She was handed a life-belt and was put into the boat, taking a seat on the starboard side. When the boat had been lowered she observed that the *Oceana* was still moving slowly, and the boat was dragged along by the ropes. For a short time the boat kept parallel with the liner, but then sheered outward and turned over on her port side, the starboard side being out of water. To the upper edge Miss Macfarlane clung, the others, with the exception of one man, who hung on to the ropes of the falls, being washed out and lost sight of. The boat then moved in towards the ship's side, struck it, and smashed her bows, but righted herself, and Miss Macfarlane was able to stand up in her and call for assistance. Whilst she was so doing, the man swarmed up the ropes and regained the *Oceana's* deck. A few minutes later another boat (that under the 3rd officer) passed her and she got in.

Meanwhile, assistance was coming to the *Oceana*. The Cross-Channel steamer *Sussex*, belonging to the London, Brighton & South-Coast Railway, on her way to Newhaven from France was the first to render assistance. Her master, Captain Ellis, sent a boat under his 2nd officer, Mr. Mahoney, who assisted in the transfer of the *Oceana's* company, 187 of the crew and 27 passengers being safely taken aboard.

The *Sussex* arrived at Newhaven some four hours later, and the passengers, who were still clad in the scantiest of clothing through having been afraid to go below whilst the *Oceana* was sinking, left for London, where they were met by an official of the P. & O. line who invited them to stay at the Grosvenor Hotel.

The Newhaven motor-lifeboat, the Newhaven tug *Alert*, the Eastbourne lifeboat, and the collier *Queensgarth*, were also by now in attendance on the *Oceana*. Some of the passengers, including Miss Macfarlane, who was badly bruised and in a state bordering on prostration, were taken by the Eastbourne lifeboat to the latter place and put up at the Albion Hotel; the *Oceana's* carpenter, Mr. Tredigo, of London, was taken to the Princess Alice Hospital there, where, unfortunately, he had to have a leg amputated. Another member of the crew, Horace Chandler, suffered a broken thigh, and a passenger, Mr. Thomas Charlton, a broken arm. These two were sent to the Westminster Hospital in London.

The tug *Alert* took the fast sinking liner in tow and made all possible speed towards Dover. But before many miles had been covered the *Oceana* took a list which rapidly became so serious that the captain, pilot, officers, and members of the crew who had remained were forced to take to the *Alert*, and the cables were cut. At a point almost due south of Eastbourne and within two miles of the Royal Sovereign lightship the *Oceana* went down. Just before she sank she heeled over, her stern coming out of the water, and she went down slowly, taking twenty minutes to disappear, eventually coming to rest on the bottom with her masts and tops of her funnels shewing above the surface. No less than seven hours elapsed between the striking and the sinking.

And what had happened to the *Pisagua*? Her collision bulkhead had held, and though she was in a bad condition she kept afloat and was picked up by the Dover tugs *Arcadia* and *Conqueror*. A pilot went aboard her, and she was eventually taken into Dover for repairs. For this work the *Arcadia* was

awarded £1,350, the *Conqueror* £650, and the pilot £100 for salvage.

Within a few hours of the disaster the first of the bodies of those who had been lost from No. 1 boat were picked up. About 11.30 on Saturday morning the French trawler *La Champagne*, of Boulogne, put into Newhaven with the bodies of a stewardess, Mrs. Newbury, and a Lascar. Each was wearing two life-belts and was in addition holding on to a lifebuoy.

As well as a valuable cargo of merchandise, the *Oceana* was carrying bar gold, bar silver, and gold coin for Port Said and Bombay to the value of £747,110, and immediate steps were taken for the recovery of this wealth by the Liverpool Salvage Association, under Captain Young, and ten days after the sinking the first case of specie was found and raised. Eventually, practically the whole of the treasure was reclaimed from the sea.

Then, of course, followed the business of placing the responsibility for the accident, and the law began to move in several places. On April 16th the Maritime Court at Hamburg found that the *Oceana* was at fault, as in contravention of the rules of the road at sea she had attempted to make way for the *Pisagua's* green light, sighted to port, by starboarding her helm, but began the manoeuvre too late. No blame of any kind could be attached to the *Pisagua*.

In this connection it must be mentioned that in German nautical parlance "to starboard the helm" means the reverse of what it does in this country. It will have been noticed that both the pilot and chief officer of the *Oceana* gave orders to port the helm.

In addition to this finding of the German court against the *Oceana*, an action for damages brought by the P. & O. Line against the owner of the *Pisagua* was lost on May 3rd, Sir Samuel Evans, President of the Admiralty Division, saying that the plaintiffs



RAISING A BASKET OF SILVER FROM THE WRECK OF THE OCEAN.

were alone to blame. And on April the 30th the Board of Trade enquiry was opened. This court's finding was formulated on June 25th.

Interesting as was the evidence given, it cannot be retailed here at length, and it was of such a nature that excerpts would not only confuse, but would be unfair to the parties concerned.

Briefly stated, the finding was that the *Oceana* was at fault and was lost through the wrongful act of the chief officer. She did not take the proper steps to keep out of the way of the *Pisagua*, but attempted to cross ahead of her. (Article 17 of the international code for preventing collisions at sea says : "A steamship shall keep out of the way of a sailing ship.") The *Oceana* neither slackened speed, stopped, nor reversed, and she failed to make any sound signals. There was no neglect on the part of the *Pisagua*. The cause of the overturning of boat No. 1 was that she was lowered without the painter being made fast inboard the *Oceana*, which was going ahead, the inability of those in the boat to detach the forward fall when the boat reached the water (the axes had been removed from the boats owing to thefts in port), and the boat's sheering out and being swamped.

It was considered that the boat was lowered prematurely, this being due to a misunderstanding between the master and the chief officer. The "accident boat" was lowered, but with seventeen people in her, and as a rescue boat was therefore practically useless.

The court considered that an attempt should have been made to beach the *Oceana* ; it condemned the pilot's act in suddenly assuming command at a critical moment, but was satisfied that the order he gave in no way caused the collision. The loss of life was caused by an error of judgment on the part of the chief officer in lowering No. 1 boat without a definite

order from the master, by the omission of the master and chief officer to take adequate steps to rescue the persons thrown into the water, and by the failure of the third officer to make any sustained effort to save anyone beyond Miss Macfarlane. The measures that were taken to save life exhibited undue haste at their commencement and yet were on the whole slow in execution. The court suspended the chief officer's certificate for six months.

CHAPTER XVI

TITANIC!

Oceanic Steam Navigation Co.'s Liner (White Star)
45,000 tons gross Register
Built 1911, Belfast
Sunk in collision with ice
2.20 a.m., April 15th, 1912
500 miles south of Cape Race, Newfoundland
1,494 lives lost

New York. April 15th, 8.20 a.m. "The *Titanic* sank at 2.20 this morning. No lives were lost."

Later. "The liner *Virginian* reports in a wireless communication that the liner *Titanic*, which is reported to have been in collision with an iceberg, has requested assistance. The *Virginian* is hastening to her aid."

Later. "The *Virginian* is towing the *Titanic* slowly towards Halifax."

Later. "The *Titanic* sank at 2.20 a.m. on Monday after all the passengers had been lowered into lifeboats and transferred to the *Virginian*. The liner *Carpathia* with several hundred passengers from the *Titanic* is now on her way to New York."

Halifax. April 15th. "The *Titanic* is slowly sinking. She will probably be beached if a suitable spot can be reached before she sinks."

From the *Olympic*. "Please allay the rumour that *Virginian* has any *Titanic* passengers."

New York. April 15th, 8.40 p.m. "White Star officials now admit that many lives were lost."

New York. 9.35 p.m. "It is now admitted that there has been horrible loss of life."

Minute by minute realisation of the nature of the disaster grew. From out of the maze of rumours that merely seemed to tell of a serious accident there was gradually unfolded the story of an appalling catastrophe. Rarely, if ever, before or since has the world been so incredulous at first news of disaster, or so horrified when at last there was no longer doubt that an event of unparalleled magnitude had happened.

Buoyed up at first by false hopes and false messages, many of them due to private interference with wireless communications, the public in this country and America could not bring itself to believe that the *Titanic*, one of the greatest and most splendidly equipped ships that has ever been built, could sink, much less that she had sunk, and it is probably for this reason that the reaction which took place was of so violent a character

The *Titanic*, Captain Smith, belonging to the Oceanic Steam Navigation Co. (The White Star Line), 45,000 tons gross register, carrying with her 1,308 passengers and a crew of 898, left Southampton for New York on April 10th, 1912, it being her maiden voyage. She was then the largest ship in the world and was of a most luxurious character. Her fittings throughout were calculated to make an appeal to all classes. For the 800 steerage passengers there was a degree of comfort and cleanliness unheard of and undreamt of fifty years before; for the first and second class passengers there was luxury—the best of food, the softest of beds, the smoothest of service, music, games, amusements, and the gay social intercourse which marks modern passenger life at sea.

Amongst her first-class passengers were some of the richest people in the world; they had been referred to as "a shipload of millionaires", and some enterprising American had computed their total possessions to amount to over one hundred millions sterling. Two of the sets of cabins had cost their occupants £870 for the voyage, one of them falling to Mr. and Mrs. G. D. Widener. Mr. and Mrs. Isidor Straus, Benjamin Guggenheim, the banker, Colonel Astor, Mr. C. M. Hays, President of the Canadian Grand Trunk Railway, Major Butt, aide-de-camp to President Taft, Mr. Bruce Ismay, managing director of the White Star Line, and Mr. W. T. Stead were also passengers.

The *Titanic* encountered fair weather, and not one of her company can have entertained the thought for a moment that there was any greater danger there than in an hotel on dry land. It was generally thought that the *Titanic* was "unsinkable", an idea doubtless fostered by her great size, which would allow for so many bulkheads that several watertight compartments could be flooded without endangering the vessel. The *Titanic* carried 14 lifeboats, 2 cutters, 4 collapsible boats or rafts, 3,560 lifebelts, and 48 lifebuoys, the boat accommodation being for 1,178, which complied with the then rules and regulations of the Board of Trade under the Merchant Shipping Act.

The voyage was nearly over. Within not many hours it would be time to be getting ready to go ashore, the great liner would be making her first triumphal entry into New York Harbour, where the syrens from other craft would greet her arrival, bunting would stream in the wind, and the docks would be crowded with friends and relatives of the passengers to welcome them with waving handkerchiefs, laughter, and cheers.

But, alas, when the pitiful remnant of the *Titanic's* company eventually came to New York it was in silence ; flags drooped at half-mast from the harbour's craft and the city buildings, and mourners with ambulances stood on the dock-side. The survivors were greeted with tears.

Slow as was realisation of the extent of the catastrophe on shore, it was almost equally as slow in coming to the passengers in the ship herself. In a vessel of the size of the *Titanic* it is obvious that any occurrence of the kind must have different immediate effects on the passengers according to their position in the vessel. The experience of one was by no means the experience of all, and many and varied are the accounts to choose from. In some instances the shock was hardly felt ; in others it was instantly clear that something terrible, even if not necessarily fatal, had happened. Some knew that the *Titanic* had struck ice ; others were laughingly told—and they believed it—that she had rammed a whale. Even experienced seamen were deceived as to the severity of the blow and the consequences of the wound.

But though the effects of the wound both upon ship and those she bore were comparatively slow, it was inflicted with lightning-like rapidity. Here was no grim fight of ship against the elements, no ultimate yielding beneath hammer-blows of wind and wave. Here was assassination as if from ambush.

The sea was calm. No wind howled in the rigging and funnel-stays, or lashed white horses across a rain-swept waste. The stars shone clear and bright and with the streaming port-hole and deck-lights of the liner were reflected in an oily swell. In the liner scenes as are to be observed in any great hotel were taking place. Passengers listened to the band, played cards, smoked, had their cocktails, chatted, laughed,

strolled about, discussed business, dictated to their secretaries, took their hot baths, read their books, slept—all forgetful of the sea and “its unfathomable cruelty.”

The *Titanic* had that day, Sunday, April 14th, been informed by the *Caronia* and the *Baltic* of the presence of “growlers” (icebergs with only a small part shewing above water), and field-ice, the *Caronia* wirelessly her information as early as 9 a.m. Captain Smith, however, had not altered course to any appreciable extent, nor had he slackened speed from 21 knots. But warning to keep a sharp look-out for ice had been given to the men in the crow’s-nest.

The first to see the approach of tragedy were the latter. Just after seven bells in the first watch (about 11.40 p.m.) seaman Fleet sighted an iceberg right ahead. It was very close. He rang the alarm bell and telephoned to the bridge. As a result the 1st officer, Mr. Murdoch, instantly changed the ship’s course. But it was too late. The *Titanic* struck the berg.

But even to the look-out the occurrence had no terrors yet. The blow was a glancing one on the starboard bow about twenty feet from the stem, and, thinking that no harm had been done, he regarded the affair as a narrow shave. Unaware of what had happened below, he did not know that a mortal wound had been received and that water was pouring into the ship.

Those who knew were the watch below in the engine-room, numbering about a hundred. Of these, eight firemen and greasers were eventually saved, and one of them told how “suddenly whilst they were carrying on with their work the side of the ship came in upon them”. There was a noise like the firing of a gun, and water poured in. They were forced to retire to the next section and close the

water-tight doors. In actual fact a gash 300 feet long had been torn in the liner's side below the water-line.

The bridge, too, knew that the situation was serious. On receiving the alarm from the crow's-nest, Mr. Murdoch had given the order: "Hard a-starboard!", had rung the engines full astern, and closed the water-tight doors. Captain Smith, rushing out of his room through the wheel-house on to the bridge and demanding: "What was that?", was told what had happened, and began to give orders for the lifeboats to be got out and for the passengers to put on lifebelts. To keep them as calm as possible those nearby were informed that the latter was "as a prudent measure."

He went himself to the wireless room to order calls for assistance to be sent out, and, the lights of a steamer having been reported by his officers, rockets to summon her to the rescue were sent up.

Of the ships that received the *Titanic's* call, it was the Cunarder *Carpathia*, 13,603 tons, Captain Ros-tron, that alone was able to render assistance. The wireless operators of the *Titanic* were Jack Phillips, chief, and Harold Bride, assistant. Ordered to send out the C.Q.D., they did so at first "light-heartedly", being like so many others aboard, not appreciative of the danger they were in. A little while later, however, they had cause to change their opinion. Captain Smith reappeared, the gravity of the situation written on his face. He told them to send the S.O.S., adding the significant words: "It may be your last chance."

The call was picked up by the *Carpathia* more or less by accident. Thomas Cottam, her sole operator, had returned to the wireless room to ask the operators of the *Titanic* if they were aware that there was a batch of messages for them from Cape Race. The reply he received was a dramatic one.

Instead of the calm words that might be expected to greet such a communication or, possibly, the chaff with which wireless operators occasionally amuse one another at sea, there came the cry : " Come at once ; we have struck a berg ! "

Cottam could hardly believe the call, and asked if he was intended to go to the bridge and get the ship turned round. The answer was : " Yes. Quickly ! "

Cottam thereupon went straight to the officer of the watch. The *Carpathia* was turned, the *Titanic* was given the *Carpathia's* position and was informed that assistance was coming.

Meanwhile the passengers of the *Titanic* are playing their parts in this great drama, each according to his nature. One feels the shock of the impact whilst playing cards, sees ice crashing against the port-holes, and rushes on deck ; but there, firmly believing that the ship cannot sink, begins to look upon the event as an unexpected thrill, a fillip to the voyage. Another is smoking quietly in his cabin and goes on smoking till a steward knocks at his door and says the ship is sinking. On deck there is bustle and excitement but no general panic. The boats are swung out and lowered until level with B deck. The cry goes up : " All men stand away from the boats. All ladies retire to the deck below ! " Faces become graver now ; the affair is, perhaps, more serious than was thought. Some get into the boats, but before they are lowered repent of their foolish fears and return to the deck. Others remain in the ship, helping with the boats' falls, telling the occupants that it is cold on the water, and that they will be glad enough to come back. Wives refuse to be separated from their husbands. Some get out of the boats when they hear they are to go alone ; others have to be torn from their husbands' arms and forced into the boats. In some parts of the vessel dramas of fear are being

played. A seaman holds back a rush for the boat he is in charge of with a tiller, felling a man and throwing others out by main force. An officer, having filled one boat until he is afraid it must buckle beneath the weight, sees people on the rails of the decks as the boat passes them on its way to the water "glaring and ready to spring". He draws his a revolver and fires along the ship's side, shouting to them to keep back.

But in the greater part of the ship belief that she can go down, can fill with water and vanish into the depths of the Atlantic is slow in taking hold. There are those who know, but in kindness to others they keep their counsel. The thought of inevitable death has yet risen in few minds.

How could it? The band is playing. All the lights of the *Titanic* blaze. The boats are pulling off to a slight distance, lanterns burning in them. The sea is as calm and gentle as a pond. The stars twinkle above. The scene, in the words of a survivor, is "in its beauty like fairyland."

But at last all the boats have gone. Time passes and there are no recalling shouts or whistles blown to summon them back to the ship. They have taken about 700 people. Over 1,600 remain. It begins to creep into their minds that if the *Titanic* does go down they are lost. She is beginning to list; she is down by the bows. Can the *Titanic* truly sink?

The cant of the deck gets worse. From below comes the gurgle and suck of water making its way along the alleyways and into cabin after cabin as the ship settles slowly down. Steadily, with unhurrying but terrible regularity, the *Titanic* sinks, sinks, sinks.

Then the lights go out. Not one fails now to realise the horror of the situation. An immense clamour rises from the *Titanic*, a great mournful,

despairing cry that echoes far out over the still sea, to be heard by those in the boats, to echo for years in the hearts of those who have left loved ones behind, to haunt some, perhaps, for ever.

Many of the boats are full. No use if they return. Seamen bend to the oars and row and row, pulling with all their strength to get away from the heart-rending cries. Others, less full, dare not return. In an instant they would be borne down by the weight of hundreds of panic-stricken creatures now maddened by the remorseless approach of death.

And then the end. "For three hours we heard the cries," said a survivor. "And at last the *Titanic* sank. Her stern went up slowly till it was straight on end, and there was a crash of machinery falling through her. She remained so for about five minutes and then gently slipped beneath the surface of the sea, whilst there arose the most appalling sound—the death cries of hundreds."

During those last few minutes of the *Titanic* there was fear. There was also great heroism. Some, knowing that they could not swim, and that the bitter coldness of the water must soon numb all feeling into death, stood stoically erect until flung by the slope of the deck into the sea. Men strove to the last to console their women-folk; women prepared to die beside those they loved. The band continued to play to within ten minutes of the end, playing hymn-tunes at first, and later, lighter music to give courage to their hearers. They even tried to play whilst buckling on their lifebelts. Below, those in charge of the mails—the *Titanic* carried 3,418 sacks—strove to drag up the property of which they were in charge to the higher decks with some idea of its being saved, and died to a man whilst doing so.

A group of men found a collapsible boat and made an eleventh-hour effort to launch it. At last with

great difficulty it was got afloat with fifty persons in it. It turned over almost immediately, turned over in all four times, and each time it was righted by a smaller crew, death by drowning or the bitter cold having taken the rest. Fifteen at last remained, and these succeeded in reaching the lifeboats and being transferred to them.

Amongst them was Harold Bride, the assistant wireless operator. Remaining in the ship to the last, he had lined up with others on the top of the wireless room. From there he had been washed away when the ship sank, but had succeeded in swimming to the collapsible boat. He last saw his colleague, Phillips, standing on the roof of the wireless room. The latter was amongst the lost.

Both wireless operators behaved with great gallantry throughout. When Phillips had sent Bride to tell the captain the *Carpathia* was coming, Captain Smith came himself and told them to look out for themselves. He told them that the engine-room was taking water, and that the dynamos might not last much longer. But they did not leave their post at the captain's orders. Phillips did not put on a life-belt until, whilst he was communicating with the *Olympic*, his assistant put one on for him. In spite of the anxiety of their position and the burden on their shoulders, they found time to take care of a lady who had fainted in the wireless cabin, and they did not leave their post until the water was nearly level with the boat deck.

The officers all did their work very well. Mr. Harold Lowe, the fifth officer—it was he who had fired his revolver to intimidate those who had tried to rush his overcrowded boat—took charge of a group of five boats and ordered them to row over the spot where the ship had sunk. By so doing some of the boats rescued a few passengers who were still struggling



A "GROWLER" OF THE KIND WITH WHICH THE S.S. TITANIC COLLIDED

in the water. The sight which met the eyes of these rescuers was a terrible one. The sea was crowded with hundreds of dead bodies in lifebelts, and it was almost impossible to row for the number of bodies and the wreckage.

Mr. Lowe ordered these boats to remain together, as a passing steamer would be more likely to see a group of boats than a small object. After having got clear of the wreckage they saw the *Carpathia's* lights, and at the same time fell in with two of the collapsible boats. The passengers of one of the latter were taken off and the other was taken in tow.

At this point must be introduced one of the saddest circumstances of the wreck of the *Titanic*. Whilst she was still afloat the lights of a steamer had been seen between eight and ten miles ahead. They were observed by several people, amongst them Mr. Lightholler, the second officer. This steamer appeared to be stationary, and it was with the idea of attracting her attention, as well as other possible ships in the neighbourhood, that rockets had been sent up for a long period. Her lights were still visible to some of the boats and, obeying orders Captain Smith had given, the seamen began to pull towards her. At the *Carpathia's* coming in sight, however, efforts to reach the stranger were discontinued. Of this latter ship more will be said later, for it has to be recorded that she was not a figment of anyone's imagination, that she was stationary within a few miles of the *Titanic* during the whole period of her agony, and that there were those in her who actually saw the rockets of distress the *Titanic* was sending up.

Of the many hundreds who were washed from the decks of the *Titanic* but a handful possessed sufficient stamina to withstand the terrible cold of the sea, chilled by the presence of ice. Captain Smith remained with his ship until the bridge was being submerged,

and then leapt overboard without a lifebelt. According to one story, he swam for some time with a child in his arms, found a boat, had it taken aboard, and then swam back towards the *Titanic* and his death.

One or two succeeded in clinging to wreckage and holding on till picked up by rafts or boats that had returned. Many were saved by a raft. Those on this craft picked up swimmer after swimmer until at last it was dangerous to take more, and they were compelled to turn them away. "Hold on to what you have," was the cry, and many a brave man, knowing he was going to death, turned away from the raft, wishing its occupants good luck.

All through the night waves washed over the raft, whilst "all the weary time there was never a moment when prayers did not rise above the waters." In the morning there were several dead; a pitiful, half-frozen remainder was picked up by the boats.

Amongst the ships that had received the *Titanic's* call for help were the *Baltic*, the *Olympic*, the *Virginian* and the *Carpathia*. The *Virginian*, which had been falsely reported at various times to have picked up all the passengers or to be taking the *Titanic* in tow, was 170 miles west of the *Titanic*, and did not expect to reach her before 10 o'clock in the morning. The *Baltic*, homeward bound, steamed back for nine hours before being informed by the *Carpathia* that further effort was useless. The *Carpathia*, however, arrived on the scene at daybreak. Every effort had been made to reach the *Titanic* before she finally disappeared. This was fated not to be, and when the *Carpathia* arrived there was nothing to be seen but the boats, ice, and wreckage. The first of the boats, containing 18 men, was picked up just after dawn, the last, crowded with women, at 8.30.

Whilst the crew of the *Carpathia* was busy getting the survivors aboard all was quiet. The people came

on deck without fuss, murmuring their thanks, subdued, but calm.

But when it was realised that all had been taken aboard, that the *Carpathia* would find no more persons alive, then "bedlam broke loose". Then rose the cries of the fatherless and the widows, and hope that had burned, even if only with flickering light, during the hours in the boats, went out for ever.

The *Carpathia* cruised round the grave of the *Titanic*, picked up a few bodies, and turned away towards land. She bore with her seventy women who had been made widows that night. The *Virginian* arrived later and found no living soul.

By now it was known in England and America that a very great catastrophe had happened. The wireless operator of the *Carpathia*, assisted by Bride, was unceasingly employed. He worked without sleep during Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday till the afternoon, sending a list of names of the survivors and messages from them to their relatives and friends. But as yet no clear story of what had happened was available on shore, and the efforts made by private wireless stations in America greatly added to the confusion and to the raising of false hopes.

However, on April 18th, at 7 p.m. the *Carpathia* wirelessly: "The weather has been very hazy since this morning. We were about ninety-five miles east of Ambrose at noon. Two ambulances will be required. The wireless is working unsatisfactorily."

Later: "The *Carpathia* will be at the pier in two hours' time." And at 8.36 p.m. she docked.

The atmosphere was one of intense gloom and depression. The crowds that had been haunting the White Star and Cunard offices crept mournfully to the pier, the gladness of those whose friends were amongst the saved dimmed by the sorrow of their

less fortunate neighbours. The ambulances were ready. The Women's Relief Committee brought clothing and necessities for the steerage passengers, for whom also the municipal lodging-houses were thrown open. Other relief funds made preparations to help the rest. The newspaper reporters got about their business, and at last to the horrified, anxious world the full story was made public.

Whilst the sympathy of all the nations was being expressed to the English and American governments, and memorial services were being held in St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Cathedral, and churches in the United States, high authorities were preparing to probe the reasons for the disaster to the bottom.

The bitterness caused in America by this disaster was great. One cannot say at this distance of time that it was altogether unreasonable, for America had lost many of her citizens, and it was realised for the first time by the general public that great ships could go to sea equipped with sufficient lifeboats for only a proportion of those they carried.

The United States Senate with praiseworthy rapidity appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Senator Smith to investigate the disaster, the underlying reason being solely a desire to discover means for making further such tragedies impossible; but at times the investigations took on a somewhat personal and irrelevant tone. A section of the Press seized the opportunity to attack the British Board of Trade and Mr. Bruce Ismay, who was saved, and we were treated to the spectacle of a newspaper magnate, who is now as maudlingly pro-British as he was then hysterically anti-, lashing himself into a dance of rage before the American public and demanding the head of Mr. Ismay on a charger. As a matter of fact, prompt steps had been taken by Mr. Ismay to make alterations, and orders to provide further life-saving

appliances for passengers were given before the Senate Committee made its recommendations or the British Board of Trade issued its amended regulations which are now in force.

The Senate Committee's findings were presented to the Senate on May 28th. The most vital were to the effect that the *Titanic* virtually ignored the ice warnings, and that no general or systematic warnings to passengers of their peril after the ship had struck the berg were given. There was also reference to the lights of that mysterious steamer which has been mentioned as having stood at some distance during the fateful night.

This steamer was the *Californian*, 6,223 tons gross register, of the Leyland Line, and though there is no desire to rake up a very distressing incident, there can be no doubt that she was a witness of the sinking of the *Titanic*.

At 11.30 p.m. on the 14th the wireless operator of the *Californian* had gone to bed after warning all vessels in the vicinity of the dangerous proximity of ice. So dangerous was this that the *Californian's* master had stopped his vessel and kept her so all night. At 1.15 a.m. he was informed that a steamer previously observed (the *Titanic*) had stopped in sight and had fired a white rocket. Later this steamer was thought to be moving away, and subsequently she vanished. Next morning news of the disaster was learnt.

Had the master of the *Californian* roused his wireless operator—who went to bed only ten minutes or so before the *Titanic's* first call for help was sent out—he would have learnt that the *Titanic* had not stopped as a precautionary measure, and he would have been able to render invaluable service. It is fair to say that he remained firmly convinced that the ship he saw was not the *Titanic*, though the

Senate Committee came to the conclusion that the *Californian* saw the latter's signals and failed to respond to them.

The Senate had warm praise for Captain Rostron, of the *Carpathia*, passed a resolution of thanks to him, and voted £200 for a medal to be presented to him.

The British enquiry was opened on May 2nd, and its report was published on July 31st. The court found that no blame was incurred by Captain Smith. He might have turned to the southward on hearing of the presence of ice, or he might have reduced speed, but did neither. The evidence shewed that he had followed the invariable practice, but the event had proved the practice to be bad. The disaster was due to collision with an iceberg, brought about by the excessive speed at which the ship was being navigated. The court also found that the Board of Trade's omission during so many years to review the rules of 1894 was blameworthy.

There was also reference to the *Californian*. "She was within a distance of ten miles, and had she pushed her way through the ice, as she could have done without risk, she might have saved many, if not all, of the lives that were lost."

The actual number of persons saved was 712, made up as follows—

189 men of the crew.

129 men passengers.

394 women and children.

Suggestions were widely put forward to account for the comparatively small number of women saved. As has been seen, there was great reluctance at one time on the part of the women to leave in the boats. Mrs. Isidor Straus, as an example, put her maid into a boat and returned to her husband, saying: "We have been together many years. We are not going

to separate now." Not only was there fear of the water, but there was fear of the actual journey down the ship's sides in the boats, a distance of sixty-five feet. Captain Smith had apparently some idea of getting over this fear by getting the people into the boats through the gangway doors in the ship's side. In fact, he ordered seamen to row under the doors, but none of the doors ever appear to have been opened. The failure of this scheme would also account for the fact that several boats went down the side with a disproportionate number of seamen to passengers.

Knowledge that the *Carpathia* was coming to their help and the lights of the *Californian* are also said to have had something to do with the sparse filling of some of the boats.

Great indignation was expressed throughout America and England at the confused reports of the disaster which were in circulation in the initial stages, especially those which made it appear that the *Titanic* was safe, though injured, and that no lives had been lost. It was widely thought at the time that these messages were intentional hoaxes of one sort or another—President Taft set the Secret Service in motion—but the probability is that they were due to interference on the part of private wireless station owners in America who were then under very little, if any, government control.

As an instance of how confusion might possibly arise, the following messages from the *Olympic* are quoted :

The *Olympic* had received a wireless : "*Asian* heard *Titanic* signalling Cape Race on and off from 8 to 10 Sunday. Messages too faint to read. Finished calling S.O.S. midnight. No further information. *Asian* then 300 miles west of the *Titanic* and towing oil-tank to Halifax."

At 3.20 p.m. on Monday the *Olympic* received a query: "Are all *Titanic* passengers safe?"

It will be seen from the above how easily a not too expert Morse reader might gather that the *Titanic* was being towed to Halifax, or by the missing of one word from the query addressed to the *Olympic*, take down the message: "All *Titanic* passengers safe."

For some time after the occurrence bodies were picked up. The *Mackay-Bennett*, from Halifax, chartered by the White Star Line, became a "funeral ship" to go in search of bodies, and after burying many at sea, returned on April 30th with 190, including those of Colonel Astor and Isidor Straus. Other vessels found bodies, and at 12.30 on May 15th the *Oceanic* fell in with a collapsible raft. In it were a man in evening dress, a fireman, and a seaman. There were also a fur coat, hairpins, ladies' rings, and other articles suggesting that it had contained several more people when it left the *Titanic*, probably having floated off the top deck when the liner went down. This boat had remained afloat exactly a month and had drifted 350 miles right in the track of shipping. There was no food nor water in it, and there was evidence that its unhappy occupants had tried to eat cork. The bodies were covered with tarpaulin, weighted, and were buried at sea, the *Oceanic's* doctor reading the burial service over them.

On May 29th Captain Rostron was presented by a committee of survivors with a loving-cup, his officers and men with medals as token of gratitude for their services. Mr. Lowe was presented with a gold watch and chain by the inhabitants of Barmouth in recognition of his gallant conduct during the wreck, and a memorial was raised at Godalming, Surrey, in honour of Jack Phillips, the lost wireless operator.

Out of evil good sometimes comes. The loss of

the *Titanic* has resulted in a tightening up of the regulations regarding life-saving appliances carried in passenger steamers throughout the world. The cry of "Lifeboats for all!" went up, and to-day no ship that comes under British or American jurisdiction can take passengers to sea without boats enough for every man, woman, and child. In this respect it can be said that those who died in the *Titanic* did not lose their lives in vain.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BURNING OF THE *VOLTURNO*

Canadian Northern Steamship Co.'s Steamer
3,602 tons gross Register
Built 1906, Glasgow
On fire North Atlantic
October 9th, 1913
103 Passengers, 30 Officers and Crew lost

The burning of the *Volturno* is one of the most remarkable episodes of its kind in the history of the sea. Against this unhappy vessel, carrying a total of 654 souls, fire, water, and tempest ranged themselves in a trinity of wrath ; and though through the agency of wireless telegraphy there came to her aid an unprecedented number of ships, she was for many terror-crowded hours as remotely separated from them as if the sea had been bare. The drama of the *Volturno* was played before the eyes of thousands—helpless witnesses of the sufferings of their fellows. Faced with death by fire in the ship, the passengers and crew of the *Volturno* found the way of escape assailed by the fury of the sea ; those who did succeed in leaving her during the first few hours of her peril were swept away to unknown deaths, and for nearly twenty-four hours the tempest held off a ring of would-be helpers.

About 8 o'clock on the morning of October 9th, 1913, the Cunard *Carmania*, Captain Barr, heard an S.O.S. which was being sent out by the *Volturno*.

The latter ship stated that she was on fire and in need of immediate assistance. Her position was Lat. 48.25 North, Long. 34.33 West (roughly, mid-Atlantic). The *Carmania* was about eighty miles distant, and her master, putting additional firemen to work, got an extra two knots out of his ship and arrived in the neighbourhood of the *Volturno* about noon, the smoke of her burning having been seen for some twenty miles.

It was immediately seen that the *Volturno* was in a bad way. Smoke was pouring from her fore part, small explosions were continually taking place in her foreholds, her passengers were crowding the rails towards the stern, some of her davit gear was hanging down, and she was rolling heavily in a terrific sea, which was being lashed to fury by a north-westerly gale.

The severed falls told of attempted escapes by boat, and the *Carmania* was informed that six had been lowered. Four of these had, however, been capsized or smashed, the remaining two having been driven away by the wind and lost sight of.

It was then fully expected that the *Volturno* might blow up at any moment, and preparations were made in the *Carmania* for a desperate attempt to get a boat across. Mr. Francis Gardener, the first officer, was placed in charge of a lifeboat, with a volunteer crew of six seamen and three stewards—there was no lack of volunteers—and the perilous launching was essayed.

Several oars were broken before the boat left the liner's side, but eventually getting away, though receiving a fearful buffeting in the waves, the crew made an heroic attempt to reach the *Volturno*, over which terrific seas were breaking.

It was not, however, a case of willingness or seamanship—both were present in marked degree—

but human strength, endurance, and knowledge were defeated by the power of the storm, and after a brave struggle the boat was compelled to return, not having been able to approach the burning ship. Here again danger presented itself, and Captain Barr shouted to Mr. Gardener to "get the crew out and let the boat go." But with superb seamanship Mr. Gardener got his boat alongside with only three oars left and was safely hoisted inboard the *Carmania*.

During this time the *Carmania* had reported the event by wireless to other ships, and the *Seydlitz*, Norddeutscher Lloyd, of 8,008 tons gross register, had arrived. Captain Barr thereupon asked her to stand by, and signalled to the *Volturmo*, asking if he should search for the latter's missing boats. The reply was: "Yes. But do not go too far."

The *Carmania* steamed in search for some time without sighting the boats, and then returned in answer to an urgent message from the *Volturmo*.

Attempts were then made to approach nearer to the burning ship, Captain Barr steaming to leeward, and actually getting the *Carmania* within one hundred feet of the *Volturmo's* stern. So close did he get that it was possible to see the faces of the passengers, now driven aft by the heat, and read in their expressions the despair which they felt at their position between the menaces of fire and water.

At 6.30 p.m. flames could be seen leaping through the smoke, and at 9.30 an explosion occurred, lighting up the sky with its glare. The *Volturmo's* woodwork could be seen blazing, and it was thought that she could hardly last half an hour longer.

The *Carmania* is a vessel of 19,534 tons gross register, and in view of the fact that several other vessels had arrived and were now standing by in a circle ready to do what they could for the *Volturmo's* passengers and crew, Captain Barr decided to stand

aside, keeping his vessel on the outside of the circle to minimise the risk of collision.

The ships that had arrived, guided by the cloud of smoke on the horizon, were the *Seydlitz*, already mentioned, the *Grosser Kurfurst*, 13,102 tons, Norddeutscher Lloyd, the *Kroonland*, 12,760 tons, International Mercantile Marine (Red Star), the *Devonian*, 10,435 tons, Leyland Line, the *Czar*, 1,516 tons, Russian East Asiatic Co., *La Touraine*, 8,429 tons, Cie Générale Transatlantique, and the *Minneapolis*, 13,543 tons, Atlantic Transport Line. There were also on their way the *Narrangansett*, 9,196 tons, tanker of the Anglo-American Oil Co., and the *Rappahannock*, 3,884 tons, Furness Line. Later, the *Asian*, 5,614 tons, Leyland Line, arrived, but took no part in the rescues. The *Narrangansett* had picked up Captain Barr's call for an oil-tanker, it being thought that the use of oil in greater quantities than is carried by a ship's lifeboat might serve to still the breakers sufficiently to allow the boats to approach the *Volturmo*.

During the night hours the searchlight of the *Carmania* illumined the scene, and it was through this light that a life was saved in most heroic circumstances.

About 11 o'clock a voice was heard aboard the *Carmania* crying for help, and the rays of the searchlight picked up the figure of a man struggling in the waves and being carried past the *Carmania's* stern. Two seamen, going down the pilot's ladder, endeavoured to get lifebuoys to him, but without success, and the man, though he swam strongly, would undoubtedly have been lost had it not been for the action of Able-Seaman E. J. Highway, who plunged into the sea with a line and secured him. The latter proved to be Walter Trentepohl, a German third-class passenger, who had jumped from the deck

of the *Volturmo*. It was said that this man had been carried past the *Carmania* ten times before being rescued.

Between midnight and one o'clock the *Carmania* again saved life. A boat from the *Minneapolis*, having lost her rudder, was picked up by her after having struggled in the sea for five hours. The officer in charge, Mr. Robinson, and his men were safely got aboard in a state of extreme exhaustion and half-blinded by smoke, the boat being smashed to pieces against the liner's side. They reported that they had succeeded in getting close to the *Volturmo*, and had implored the people to jump into the water to be picked up. None had done so, and they had had to come away empty-handed.

Later that night, however, on the example of members of the crew of the *Volturmo*, ordered to leap overboard by the master, thirty-two passengers were picked up by boats from the *Grosser Kurfurst*.

At last dawn came. The *Volturmo* still floated, and there were still many living souls aboard. The *Narrangansett* had arrived, and oil was being pumped on to the water. The weather had also moderated slightly, and it was almost as if at a regatta that at the first appearance of light boats began to leave the surrounding ships and make for the burning steamer. The work of rescue could now be carried on in real earnest, and eventually out of a total of 654 the following numbers were saved :

By the <i>Grosser Kurfurst</i>	105.	By the <i>Touraine</i>	40.
" " <i>Czar</i>	102.	" " <i>Minneapolis</i>	30.
" " <i>Kroonland</i>	90.	" " <i>Narrangansett</i>	29.
" " <i>Devonian</i>	59.	" " <i>Rappahannock</i>	19.
" " <i>Seydlitz</i>	46.	" " <i>Carmania</i>	1.

The rescuers from each ship had stirring stories to tell of their adventures. The *Devonian* had received the *Carmania's* first wireless messages at

12.35 and had arrived on the scene about 10 p.m. She had launched boats at 6 on the following morning. During the work of rescue a frenzied woman threw her child down to the boat's crew, but it fell between the boat's side and the ship, being in great danger of being crushed. Able-seaman Arthur Hazelwood instantly jumped overboard and came to the surface with the child in his arms. He also ran great risk of being crushed, but with some difficulty was picked up safely. Those rescued by the *Devonian's* boats were hauled up to her deck in coal baskets.

La Touraine was 205 miles from the *Volturno* when she heard the news, but arrived at 9 p.m. Her master, Captain Charles Caussin, sent away two whaleboats with great difficulty, one of them, under the 1st officer, being very nearly swamped when five passengers from the *Volturno* leapt down into her together.

The boats of the *Czar* made in all five journeys. The *Kroonland* rescued Captain Inch, the Chief Engineer, and the two wireless operators, these being the last to leave.

When at last the *Volturno* was reported completely abandoned the whole fleet of rescuing vessels steamed round over a wide area of sea, seeking the missing boats. These, however, were not found, nor were they ever heard of again.

It was now possible to obtain a clear story of what had happened in the *Volturno*, and a terrible story it was.

The *Volturno* belonged to Canadian Northern Steamships Ltd., but was under charter to the Uranium Co. She was of 3,602 tons gross register, commanded by Captain G. D. Inch, and on this occasion had 561 passengers aboard, mostly Rumanians, Poles, and Serbs, and a cargo of somewhat inflammable goods, including barium

oxide and other chemicals, peat-moss, rags, straw bottle-covers, etc.

On the 9th, Captain Inch was awakened by his chief officer with the news that smoke had been seen coming out of No. 1 hatch. He immediately gave orders for the ship to be slowed down and all hands to be sent to their stations, adding that the passengers were not to be told. The officer replied that the passengers already knew. Whilst he was dressing Captain Inch was told that the fore part of the ship was now definitely on fire, and on his coming on deck he met a quarter-master who had been badly burned. The latter told him that there were four men in the fore-castle burnt to death, and going to investigate for himself, Captain Inch fell over their bodies.

Whilst he was superintending the work of getting hoses to bear on the burning holds a very violent explosion which "shook everything" took place. The compasses were blown out of the binnacle, the steering-gear and engine-room telegraph were jammed, and it was thought that if she received another shock of like severity the ship would break in two.

The flames were now reaching back to the bridge, and life-rafts stowed alongside the foremast were on fire.

The situation was desperate. It was obvious the ship would have to be abandoned. The gale was howling round the *Volturmo*, great seas were continually sweeping her, explosions of a minor degree were continually occurring, and the passengers were in a highly nervous state. They crowded to the rails, praying, laughing, shouting, and behaving in a manner which suggested that panic was not far off.

There were later the usual "graphic stories" of "terrible scenes" in the ship, but, although it is agreed that there were isolated cases of misbehaviour,

the general conduct of the passengers, most of them ignorant people with no previous experience of the sea of any kind at all, was not despicable, and on the news being shouted by the officers throughout the ship that the *Carmania* was coming, all signs of nervousness ceased for the time.

We know now that the *Volturno* stayed afloat for several days—in fact, she had to be scuttled—and we have seen by the numbers rescued by the various ships which came to her assistance that had all stayed in her no lives other than those of the men burnt to death in the fore-castle when the fire first broke out need have been lost. But neither Captain Inch nor his officers could tell what the future held; they only knew that a very inflammable cargo was ablaze beneath their feet, that it was not yielding to the measures taken, that their ship had already suffered a severe blow from an explosion, and they feared that at any moment she might be split open by another and sent instantly to the bottom. Had there been no passengers aboard, the expedient of flooding the foreholds would have been tried, but with so many lives to think of, and with the ship already down by the bows, this was considered too risky for the circumstances, and the launching of the boats, of which the ship carried sufficient for 809 persons, was essayed.

There was a tremendous sea running. The first boat, under Mr. H. P. Miller, was capsized immediately it reached the water, and only the officer and one or two others managed to get back into her. She was then carried away from the ship's side and disappeared. The next boat, commanded by the 4th officer, Mr. Langzel, got away safely, but was also lost sight of.

At the first order to launch the boats many of the passengers appear to have been seized with an unreasoning fear and jumped overboard to their

deaths. Others tried to rush the boats and had to be beaten off, and there was, after Captain Inch had ordered the launching of the boats to cease, some unauthorised attempts, all of which ended in disaster. In all 6 boats out of the 19 which the *Volturmo* carried were launched, 4 being upset and their occupants drowned. Of the other two, as we have already seen, nothing further was ever heard.

Captain Inch's load of anxiety was a terrible one. The severity of the storm prevented his sending his passengers away to safety and cut him off from the would-be rescuers who were now crowding round. The heat of the fire was so great that it destroyed the nozzles of the hoses, and the seamen had to keep their heads turned away whilst they played on the flames. Captain Inch's eyes were badly affected by the smoke, and he had to have messages from his wireless operators, Messrs. W. Seddon and C. J. Pennington, read out to him as he could not see the writing.

He was made none the happier by the repeated failure of all measures taken by the surrounding ships to help him and by the refusal of passengers to jump overboard when boats managed to struggle in near enough to pick them up.

At 5 o'clock the *Kroonland* made a noble attempt to establish communication. She came in so close that the passengers in the *Volturmo* thought she was coming right alongside and cheered her on. But obviously no such expedient could be attempted with the sea in such a state, and when she steamed away cries and shrieks broke out from the immigrants, who thought themselves abandoned. But a boat was sent from the *Kroonland* and four times got in close enough for the crew to shout to passengers to jump. None of the latter would do so, and at last the boat went away.

This happened on more than one occasion. When boats from the rescuing vessels came within reach Captain Inch and his officers did their best to persuade passengers to jump. Great as were the passengers' fears, they were not sufficiently so to spur them to what they considered a remedy of despair, and on the master's orders several members of the crew leapt overboard to give the others an example. One or two did thereupon follow and were picked up; but one Frenchman, probably going out of his mind, threw overboard his wife and daughter and leapt after them when there was no boat in the vicinity, and all three were drowned.

As time went on even the more responsible persons in the *Volturno* became almost beside themselves with desperation and anxiety. Around them they could see the circle of ships—so near and yet so impotent to render help—and although they knew that all that human strength, endurance, and courage could do was being done, it seemed to them as if the ships round them were lying mere idle spectators of their sufferings.

Wireless messages, in the wording of which could be read the measure of anxiety felt, appeared to be having no effect, and at last, after a despairing message had been sent that the upper plates would soon be giving way, the 2nd officer, Mr. Lloyd, asked Captain Inch if he could lower a boat to give the other vessels a lead. The master's reply was that it was a foolhardy suggestion, but Mr. Lloyd eagerly wanted to try, and eventually permission was given to him and four men.

The *Volturno* was rolling heavily, and the falls had been cut to make life-lines; the boat therefore had to be dropped into the water. She survived this drastic ordeal, but began to leak, and Captain Inch shouted to the crew that they had better come out

of her. Mr. Lloyd and his men preferred to continue with their endeavour, and after an hour's battle with the waves, succeeded in reaching the *Grosser Kurfurst*, by whom they were taken aboard, their boat being smashed to pieces.

About 9.30 a very serious explosion occurred. This took place in the chart-room, the rockets, flares, and cartridges of the ship's magazine blowing up and wrecking the saloon, sending up flames lasting for twenty minutes seventy feet into the air. It was then positively thought that the ship was in immediate danger of going down, as is witnessed by the wireless message sent out about this time: "We cannot last much longer. Can nobody help us?"

The night wore on. Those who have experienced in war the indescribable feeling of anxiety caused by knowledge that the enemy has been mining beneath one's feet and that the sound of sapping has ceased will realise the sensations endured by the survivors of the *Volturmo*. From second to second they lived in unceasing dread that the time of final explosion had come, that at any instant the decks beneath their feet might burst open in a great flash of flame and the ship be rent to pieces.

But, as we know, their justifiable fears were happily unrealised. During the night a number of rescues were effected, and when morning came at last the state of the sea permitted rescue work on a methodical scale.

Captain Inch had the men divided from the women by a rope, sending the latter away first. Only two men gave trouble. One of these leapt over the rope and made for the ship's side; thereupon Captain Inch knocked him down. But jumping up and eluding the chief engineer, who tried to stop him, the man succeeded in getting into one of the *Devonian's* boats, where, it must be said, he received a



THE VOLTURNO ON FIRE

(Courtesy of Sir A. Spurgeon.)

hammering from the crew for his trouble. The other man was seen wearing an officer's coat, and as Captain Inch knew that there were no navigating officers at that time in the ship, he knocked him down too. No one will deny that he did the right thing.

Captain Inch did not leave till he had looked round the ship to make sure that no more living souls remained, and he took with him in his arms his dog, which he presented to Captain Kriebohm, of the *Kroonland*, whose boat took him off, as a mark of gratitude for his rescue.

By 7 a.m. on the 10th the *Volturmo* was abandoned, the various ships which had stood by, after a search for the missing boats, then proceeding to their ports of destination—New York, Liverpool, the Thames, Havre, etc. This meant, of course, that the survivors were spread about in considerable confusion, many families being widely divided. To their assistance came the Uranium Company, and prompt and thorough measures were taken to collect, reunite, and send once again upon their journeys those who had been so tragically delayed.

Meanwhile, the *Volturmo* still remained afloat. On the 14th she was seen by the *St. Louis*, of the American Line. She was then still on fire. On the 20th, however, she was sighted by the Dutch steamer *Charlois*. She was then shewing no signs of fire, and the master of the *Charlois*, not knowing what had happened, sent a boat's crew aboard. Only the dead bodies of the burnt seamen were found, and as the derelict was a grave danger to navigation, the injectors were opened, allowing a 10-inch stream of water to enter the engine-room, and the *Volturmo* was rapidly sinking when the men of the *Charlois* left. She was never seen again.

Considering the many different ways in which

human beings can react to such experiences as the passengers of the *Volturno* went through, it is not, perhaps, surprising that shipwreck seems invariably to bring in its train a veritable plethora of sensational and usually entirely mendacious stories. This disaster proved no exception to the rule, and for a time the presses of Europe hummed with stories of panic, whilst charges of cowardice, mutiny, arson, and the like were flung about in the wildest manner. Their wildness can be gauged from one example. It was stated in many quarters that the Belgian seamen in the *Volturno* had behaved in a disgraceful manner, sacrificing the passengers to their own safety. In point of fact there was not a single Belgian seaman in the ship.

With regard to panic, Captain Inch denied that he saw any. Whilst there is no doubt that there were isolated cases of "nerves" and insubordination, and boats were lowered by passengers without the master's authority, of the widespread disorder and mass-fear suggested by the word "panic" there appears to have been none.

Sir Arthur Spurgeon, who was a passenger in the *Carmania* on this memorable voyage, wrote a book entitled *The Burning of the Volturno*, and in it he suggested that there were incidents bordering on panic in parts of the ship not in Captain Inch's immediate view. This is probably a 'correct estimation of the state of affairs.

The crew behaved in an orderly manner, only leaping overboard when ordered by the master to set an example to the passengers. The engine-room staff were no exception, and their conduct is well summed up in the phrase of the 3rd engineer, Mr. Pinch, who said, "I was determined the boilers should not fail; and they did not."

The ship's baker and his assistant also must be

mentioned. They remained at their post, which was the galley, and were busy the whole day making bread and coffee for the passengers.

The Court of Enquiry, presided over by Lord Desart, Wreck Commissioner, which was opened in London on November 26th regarding this disaster, held that no blame was attached to the master and officers of the *Volturno* in relation to the fire, loss of life, or the abandonment of the vessel. It expressed its appreciation of the various acts of gallantry performed, and especially that of Mr. Lloyd, the 2nd officer, in volunteering to take a boat to one of the other ships, and of his skill and gallantry and that of his boat's crew.

No definite cause of the fire could be stated, but it was felt that it probably arose from barium oxide, the drums of which might have been burst open through the rolling of the vessel in the heavy weather which she had encountered.

Then came the honouring of the heroes. The owners of the *Volturno* expressed in court through counsel their thanks to the captains of the rescuing ships, and many presentations by various bodies were made.

The Liverpool Shipwreck and Humane Society gave gold medals and illuminated certificates of thanks to Captain Trant of the *Devonian* and Captain Barr of the *Carmania*, silver medals, barometers, and illuminated certificates of thanks to Chief Officer T. Steele, 1st Officer T. B. Knight, and 2nd Officer W. Baker of the *Devonian*, and to Chief officer Johnstone and 1st Officer F. Gardener of the *Carmania*, and other awards to members of the two crews. The Norddeutscher Lloyd promoted 1st Officer Spangenberg, in temporary command of the *Grosser Kurfurst*, to be captain and made numerous presentations. The Board of Trade made presentations of plate to

the masters, of binoculars and plate to the officers, and sums of money to the men who had displayed gallantry on this occasion. And in March, 1914, His Majesty the King presented silver medals for gallantry in saving life at sea to 232 officers and men of the various ships.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAGEDY OF THE *COLUMBIAN*

Leyland Liner

5,088 tons gross Register

Built 1890, Belfast

On fire 150 miles south of Sable Island

Midnight, May 3rd, 1914

18 lives lost

On Monday, May 4th, 1914, the cables and radio systems of the world were busy with an alarming rumour—to the effect that a great liner was on fire in the Atlantic. Who she was and how many souls were on board no one in authority knew. Consequently, amongst the general public the wildest statements were being circulated, until, exaggeration piled on exaggeration, the disaster had been attributed to almost all the great ships known to be in the Atlantic and not a few which happened to be safe in dock.

The foundation of these rumours was a message from the steamer *Seydlitz*, which on May 4th wirelessly reported that she had sighted a large steamer seriously on fire south of Sable Island. Owing to the fury of the fire she had not been able to ascertain the name of the burning vessel; but rumour had got busy and provided her with half a score.

Actually she was the *Columbian*, of the Leyland Line, a steamer of 5,088 tons gross register, under

Captain John Macdonald, who had been her master for four years, and with his owners for eighteen. She had been chartered by the Atlantic Transport Line, and by them lent to the Phoenix Line for the voyage. She was loaded by Steinmann & Co. of Antwerp with a cargo for Boston, and a highly inflammable cargo it was. It consisted of barium peroxide, matches, waste, rags, wool, carbolic acid, naphthaline, fusil oil, and other things of a like nature, the whole being a cargo with which it would be well nigh a superhuman task to deal should fire happen to break out.

The *Columbian* left Antwerp on April 23rd, with a crew of 49 all told. At midnight on May 3rd she had very nearly finished her voyage, being 150 miles south of Sable Island; but at that hour came the first inkling of grave peril—one of the most dreaded of all perils of the sea. Smoke was seen to be issuing from No. 1 hatch, an oily smoke that left a greasy black stain on hands and face. The *Columbian's* dangerous cargo was on fire.

The weather had previously been fine, but the wind, having increased during the day, was now blowing a full gale, and snow was falling. The ship was rolling heavily. Conditions were such as to make the *Columbian's* position as desperate as can be imagined.

As soon as informed of the outbreak, Captain Macdonald rushed to the bridge, had the ship put before the wind, and ordered the pumps and hoses to be manned. To his wireless operator he gave orders to send to the *Winifredian*, of the Leyland Line, known to be some twenty to thirty miles away, the message "Stand by. I am on fire," and a few minutes later the general S.O.S. Knowing the nature of his cargo, the captain can have had but little hope that he could deal successfully with the fire. In

any case, all chances in this direction were almost immediately nullified by an explosion.

"There came a sound," said the 2nd officer, "of rumbling like distant thunder. The deck blew up, and a sheet of flame ran along the vessel from fore to aft." The air was thick with black smoke and fumes, the forward part of the ship was blazing, two boats had been destroyed, part of the wireless cabin was blown up and fell on the operator, and the aerial came down.

The ship was beyond hope. Below decks the conditions were appalling. Chief Engineer C. E. Roberts was awakened by shouting and saw smoke. Jumping up, he found his cabin full of fumes with a chemical smell. He put on his boots and tried to go below to the engine-room, but was unable to do so, as the ladders had gone and the lights were out.

Edward Delf, a fireman, had a terrible experience. On the alarm of fire the 3rd engineer told him to go to the engine-room. He did so, and was engaged at his work when the explosion came. He was blown fifteen feet in the air amongst the pipe work and fell down into the bilges, the plates having been burst up. Steam was escaping, there was thick smoke, and he could hardly breathe. He was in pitch darkness, lost in the bilges of a burning ship rolling heavily in a high sea. Groping about, he found the door of the boiler-room, but, opening it, was greeted by a burst of smoke that sent him reeling and choking. Small wonder that for a time, as he himself later told, he almost gave up hope.

Eventually he got on deck by means of part of a ladder which had only some small pieces left.

The order was now "Abandon ship!" Five men had perished in the explosion, and into three boats there clambered forty-three survivors, many of them burnt or injured, one, the chief steward,

being in a serious condition. Whilst the boats were being lowered, a donkeyman was washed away by a heavy sea and was lost beyond hope of recovery. One of the boats was injured as she was being launched. The explosion having jammed the falls, she had to be cut away, and fell heavily into the water.

It was obviously the best course to pursue to endeavour to keep the *Columbian* in sight as long as possible. Any vessel coming in answer to the S.O.S. would the more easily find the boats if they were in the vicinity of their ship, now a beacon to guide would-be rescuers from afar.

It happened unfortunately that the message to the *Winifredian* was not received, owing probably to some unwitting interference, and it was not until the next day that the *Seydlitz's* message brought the *Sachem*, the *Franconia*, the *Manhattan*, the *Olympic* and the *Brandenberg* hurrying to the scene.

By the time they arrived the boats had scattered, but on the 5th the Cunarder *Franconia* made the first rescue. She had received news of the disaster through the *Georgic* and, hastening to the position given, could find no trace of the wreck. But, making a circle, she found a boat containing thirteen men and a corpse. It was flying, as a signal of distress, part of the dead man's trousers on a boathook.

The survivors were in a state of extreme exhaustion and mental collapse. They were placed in the liner's best state-rooms, six of them being under the doctor's care. Others were given brandy and soup and hot baths, and were put to bed, whereupon they all immediately fell asleep, and little information concerning the disaster could be got from them to wireless to the expectant world. The Chief Steward, who was found to be frightfully injured, became delirious soon after the rescue and died within a few hours.

After this boat had been picked up, the *Franconia* made a detour, but without effecting any further rescues.

However, on the following day the *Manhattan* found Captain Macdonald's boat, containing fourteen in all. Captain Macdonald had kept the *Columbian* in sight for some time, and when he had last seen his ship she was a mass of fire from stem to stern, and explosions were continually occurring, sending up balls of fire into the air. After this rescue, the *Manhattan* spent twenty-six hours looking for the third boat, but without result, and it was reluctantly concluded that she had foundered.

But this boat, containing 13 men under the 1st officer, Mr. Robert Tière, had not perished. She was doomed to wander unsighted for fourteen days, whilst her crew, suffering terribly from exposure and lack of food, died man by man in fearful agonies, physical and mental, some passing out suddenly, some lingering and fighting for life to the last, others dying after hours of raving madness brought on by their experiences.

The boat left the *Columbian* at 2 o'clock on the morning of May 4th. She had a cask full, a tank three parts full, of water and 75 lbs. of biscuit. There were also matches and a lantern. Unfortunately she had no compass. Why this important item was missing was explained by the fact that all the boats' compasses had been removed in Antwerp owing to the risk of theft and had been stored in the lamp-room. The lampman, T. P. Connor, told at the subsequent inquiry a simple tale that shews only too clearly what conditions can be when a fire breaks out at sea.

On the alarm of fire, he said, there was a rush of men from the forecastle. He waited to put on some clothes, and whilst doing so there was an

explosion and flames shot up from No. 1 hatch. He put his coat over his head and rushed on deck. The compasses, which he then remembered, were in the lamp-room, and in his hurry he had forgotten the key. He borrowed a key from the first officer, but in his confusion took the wrong one and could not open the door. Whilst he had gone for a crowbar another explosion occurred, and he was unable to get the compasses out.

During the first few hours in the boat the wind blew from the north, but later it became foggy, and they could not tell that they were in the Arctic stream drifting northwards, though they believed they were going south.

The smoke and fire from the *Columbian* enabled them to keep her in sight until daylight. After that, rain began to fall, and they lost sight of her. On the night following the fire they saw the lights of a vessel which they believed to be the *Olympic*, but unfortunately could not light their lantern to make a signal, owing to the wind and spray. During the morning of the next day a steamer passed them about four miles distant, but they could not attract her attention, and in the afternoon they saw another vessel.

Later a Cunarder, probably the *Franconia*, came within two miles and stopped as though picking something up. However, she soon disappeared. Their great agony began.

The officer put his boat's crew on rations of a biscuit and a half and a cup of water three times a day. When it rained they caught water in the sail. Day after day passed without their sighting a single vessel. On Saturday, May 9th, after rations had been cut down by a third, one of the men, George Hull, complained that he could not stand the short rations of water, and in spite of the advice of the others drank sea-water. That night he became delirious,

and he died on the following morning. After that one or two men died every day, and as there was no room in the boat the corpses were buried at sea.

One man, Jakob, went mad, and arming himself with a heavy stick, attacked Mr. Tière, saying that he was keeping him from going ashore where he could get beer. At last the others were forced to bind the unhappy man to a thwart. He lingered for some hours, screaming loudly the while, until death mercifully took him.

One of the last to die was a little Belgian boy, Peter Triel, and about him there is a very strange but authentic story to tell. Before the *Columbian* had sailed from Antwerp he told the men that he had had a dream of a sinking ship, and being in an open boat for fourteen days. After the *Columbian* had been abandoned this poor lad was continually complaining that they could not last out for fourteen days, and that they would never see Antwerp again. He did not, though his companions did all they could for him.

Bottom boards were laid across the thwarts, and he was placed on them above the water which swilled about in the boat. His swollen, blistered feet were carefully covered to ease the pain in them, and Mr. Tière gave him his coat. But the strain was too great. On Sunday morning, the 17th, he slid off the boards into the water below and died.

Could he have made just one more effort he would have been saved, for four hours later, at 8.15 a.m. the survivors, now numbering only four, sighted the U.S. revenue cutter *Seneca*. Summoning up their remaining strength, they began to pull across the line of her course, striving to their utmost not to let slip this chance, which they knew must be their last.

Two hours later they were picked up. Captain

Johnston, of the *Seneca*, spoke of the amazing courage of these four castaways. "The officer," said he, "was steering, and the other three poor, emaciated men, little more than animated skeletons, were pulling as hard as their remaining strength would permit. Great credit was due to the officer for the way in which he handled the boat and the men. Even when they came alongside, he did not lose his bearings, but handled the boat and gave his orders in a seamanlike manner."

And so the four gaunt sufferers came back from the sea.

On July 24th there began in London a Board of Trade enquiry into the loss of the *Columbian*. Very great interest in it was taken, owing to the fact that there had been numerous fires at sea during the preceding twelve months, and it was desired to do all possible to find a definite reason for an alarming state of affairs. A mass of evidence was taken, representatives of the foreign firms concerned coming over to London to assist. But, great as had been the conflagration on the *Columbian*, a greater was to seize the attention of the world. On August 4th the *Columbian* was forgotten, and the finding of the court, which was promulgated on August 7th, was tucked away into obscure paragraph-corners of the newspapers. It was as follows: "The Court is unable to determine the cause of the fire, though it was possibly due to an escape of barium peroxide. It blames Captain Meyer (Messrs. Steinmann's overlooker) for stowing dangerous cargo on the middle deck under hatches without extra precautions."

CHAPTER XIX

THE SINKING OF THE *EMPRESS OF IRELAND*

Canadian Pacific Railway Co.'s Liner

14,191 tons gross Register

Built 1906, Glasgow

Sunk in collision

River St. Lawrence

1.52 a.m., May 30th, 1914

1,014 lives lost

Fireman William Clarke, who was in the *Titanic* when she went down, was also on duty during the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland*. He compared his two experiences in a graphic phrase, impossible to better. "The *Titanic*," said he, "went down like a baby going to sleep. The *Empress of Ireland* rolled over like a hog in a ditch."

Alas, too true! Struck amidships by a collier loaded with coal, cruelly and mortally injured, the *Empress of Ireland* rolled over, her funnels struck the water together, and she sank in less than twenty minutes. Her boats, rafts, lifebelts, ample for all, were of little avail, and, apart from the number of those who were drowned after getting free from the sinking vessel, she took with her 800 persons whose bodies had subsequently to be freed from her grasp by divers.

Two things make the loss of this liner a disaster of especial poignancy—the rapidity with which the whole event took place, and the fact that it was

occasioned by a fog-bank, which, rolling down on the face of the water from the land, stayed just long enough to bring a ship and over a thousand souls to their end, passing away within a few minutes of the tragedy.

The *Empress of Ireland*, 14,191 tons gross register, Captain Kendall, R.N.R., belonged to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. She left Quebec for Liverpool at 4.30 p.m. on May 29th, 1914, with a total company of 1477, many of the passengers being delegates of the Salvation Army to an International Conference in London. At 1.30 a.m. she dropped her pilot and picked up mails from the steamers *Eureka* and *Lady Evelyn* off Father Point, on the right bank of the St. Lawrence a few miles from the harbour of Rimouski. The weather was fair, but now and then banks of fog came off the land, and it was during one of these intermittent phases of blindness that disaster occurred.

Shortly after leaving Father Point, Captain Kendall sighted a collier approaching up-river, distant about six miles. Then the fog fell and the lights of the collier vanished. As a precautionary measure Captain Kendall rang full speed astern on his engines and gave three short blasts on the syren to shew that he was going astern. This signal was, he claimed, answered by the collier.

Suddenly, however, the red and green side-lights of the latter came into view hardly a hundred feet away. She was travelling fast at right-angles to the liner, and it was clear that a collision must occur. Captain Kendall megaphoned to the collier to go full speed ahead and ordered his own helm hard aport, the idea being to bring the vessels starboard to starboard and so minimise the deadliness of the blow. Unhappily it was too late. The collier, weighted with 11,000 tons of coal, struck the *Empress of*

Ireland between the funnels; her bow tore through the liner's plates as if they were paper, and instantly water began to pour in at the rate of, as it was later computed, 263 tons per second.

Captain Kendall shouted to the collier to go full speed ahead into the hole she had made—to staunch the flow of water—but the latter drew away, not, as was at one time supposed, through perversity, but because her injured bows prevented her remaining in the hole. The *Empress of Ireland* thereupon heeled over to starboard and began to sink. For a moment there was thought of trying to beach her, but the steam went almost immediately, and there was nothing to do but abandon ship.

Before the collision, Captain Kendall had ordered the boats to be got ready, but so rapidly did the liner heel and sink that few were lowered, and hundreds of the people of the *Empress of Ireland* were struggling for their lives almost before they had realised that anything was amiss.

There was time, however, to send a wireless message for aid. Mr. Ronald Ferguson, the wireless operator, ran to the wireless room immediately the collision occurred, and had sent out the “stand by for distress signals” before orders came from the master to send the S.O.S. His messages were picked up by Mr. Whiteside, the wireless operator at Father Point, who replied at once that he would send assistance. The dynamos of the *Empress of Ireland* were immediately afterwards washed out—within five minutes of the impact—and communication ceased.

On hearing what had happened, Mr. Whiteside rushed down to the wharf and found Captain Berlinger, of the *Eureka*. To him he cried: “For God's sake get downstream at once. The *Empress of Ireland* has gone under!” He also sent the *Lady Evelyn*,

Captain Pouliot—both vessels luckily still had steam up—and they cast off at once. Owing to the short space of time which the liner remained afloat after the collision they did not arrive before she had sunk, but they were able to rescue many people from the over-loaded boats, arriving back between 3 and 4 a.m.

Meanwhile, the tragedy of the sinking ship was being enacted with lightning-like swiftness.

As is usual in such cases, the collision affected people differently according to their positions in the ship. The engine-room staff on duty thought at first that she had taken the ground, and only realised the seriousness of the disaster when a wall of water rushed in upon them. Many passengers can have known nothing of the accident until water burst into their cabins and their escape was cut off. Several survivors said that they felt no shock, but, alarmed by the heeling of the vessel, rushed on deck to find out what was amiss. One told how, hearing the syrens, he looked out of a port-hole and saw the collier crash into the liner's side not many feet from his head.

A Canadian medical man, Dr. J. F. Grant, had an extraordinary experience. He was thrown out of bed by the collision, tried to turn on the light, but found himself in darkness with his cabin floor tilting down and down in a terrifying manner. He had no idea what was wrong, but could hear screams coming from distant parts of the ship and the sound of rushing water. He could not at first find his cabin door, and, when he found it, could not open it. Eventually he got out into the alleyway and there, owing to the list, had to walk along the wall. At last he found a port-hole, put his head out, and was astonished to see people walking about on the ship's side as though it was the deck. He shouted, and someone came and helped him clamber through the

port-hole. Seeing a lifeboat at some little distance he swam to it, and did gallant work in rescuing and attending to those whom the boat picked up.

Scores of persons must have had similar experiences to his, with the exception that they could not find their way out of the ship, and, trapped within her sinking shell, were drowned in cabins and alleyways.

One can imagine the terror of their position. They have been aboard but a short time and hardly know their way about the ship. Suddenly comes the grinding crash of collision and the roar of intrushing water. Flung from their bunks, they stagger and scramble in the pitch-dark alley-ways. They hear the angry hiss and surge of the water as it pours into cabins ; maddened with fear, they do not know which way to turn ; then a wall of water rushes out of the darkness upon them, and they die like rats with the thunder of the water and the screams of their fellows in their ears.

Nor was the plight of those who reached the deck a much more enviable one. With every lurch of the sinking ship they had to clamber higher and higher up the deck until they reached the rail and eventually to climb over the rail and take to the ship's side. Many who could swim preferred then to take their chances in the water rather than run the risk of being sucked down when the liner finally disappeared. They walked down the ship's side as if down a beach, as one said, gently entered the water, and swam away.

But, if the sloping deck made it easier for many to reach the water, it was the cause of the loss of many lives. The tremendous list made the work of lowering the boats exceedingly difficult, and though four or five on the starboard side were got away, the list caused the port lifeboats to break away and hurtle across the deck, crushing all in their path.

Chief Officer Steede, who had rushed on deck in his pyjamas, and had started cutting away the lashings of the boats so that they might float off when the ship sank, was crushed to death when one of the port lifeboats fell across the deck.

Of heroes there were many that night. The Salvationists played noble parts, giving courage with their example to the fainter-hearted, assisting in saving women and children, strapping lifebelts on them, giving hands with the oars in the boats, and, if they had to die, dying like men.

Nor was the stage less fortunate in its representatives. Passengers in the ill-fated liner were Mr. Laurence Irving and his wife. Aroused by the collision, Mr. Irving took his wife out into the alleyway. Meeting a friend there, he asked, "Is the boat sinking?" and being told that there seemed little chance of her being beached, set about putting a lifebelt on his wife. As he was doing so a lurch of the vessel threw him down, injuring him somewhat severely. At this Mrs. Irving became frantic. Her husband, however, succeeded in pacifying her, told his friend, in answer to a query as to whether he needed any help, to look after himself, and carried his wife on deck. There, clasped in each other's arms, the couple took their last curtain together and went down with the ship.

The boats that floated away saved many lives. One survivor told how, though carried down by the ship "seemingly for fathoms," he came to the surface and held on to the keel of an upturned boat. Sighting another that was right way up, but had her canvas cover still on her, he swam to her and with the assistance of a seaman cut away the cover. The oars were intact, and the two men immediately set to work to pick up those who were floating in the water.

To and from amongst the wreckage the boats went, the seamen grasping at hair and clothing, crying, "Are you alive?" to each sodden bundle they gripped, and pulling in all who shewed the slightest signs of animation.

Captain Kendall, who had clambered from one part of the liner to another as she sank, remaining with her to the last, was eventually picked up from a grating, taken aboard the collier, and finally transferred to the *Lady Evelyn*.

In the *Lady Evelyn* was also the *Empress of Ireland's* wireless operator, Mr. Ferguson. The ship had a wireless equipment, but no operator aboard, and the cabin was locked. Mr. Ferguson, however, broke the window, got in, and communicated with Father Point, giving a description of the accident, and asking for clothes, supplies, and a train for the survivors to be sent to Rimouski Wharf.

The collier which had been the cause of this great tragedy was the *Storstad*, Captain Anderson, belonging to the Maritime Steamship Co., of Norway, managed by A. F. Klaveness & Co., of Christiania, bound from Sydney, Nova Scotia, to Montreal with coal. From the first a bitter controversy between her master and Captain Kendall arose. In fact, the latter, before he went aboard the *Lady Evelyn*, had boarded the *Storstad* and charged Captain Anderson with being responsible for the collision through changing his course during fog.

As soon as the news became widespread throughout the world the *Storstad* came in for a great volume of abuse, much of which was unmerited. It was said, for instance, amongst other things, that her crew made little or no attempt to pick up survivors from the *Empress of Ireland*. These were exaggerations. However blameworthy the *Storstad* was—and the subsequent Court of Enquiry held her responsible—

it must be said that boats were lowered by her, and that a great many people of the liner's company were saved by them, the captain's wife doing all that she could in the terrible circumstances to care for the saved women.

The survivors were taken by the *Eureka*, the *Lady Evelyn*, and the *Storstad* to Rimouski, where the officials of the Canadian Pacific Railway met them with clothing and comforts and arranged their transfer to hospitals or by train to Quebec. The latter vessel then proceeded on her voyage to Montreal.

She arrived on May 31st and was greeted by an army of pressmen and the officials of the Admiralty Court, the latter of whom "arrested" her for an alleged debt to the Canadian Pacific Railway Co. of £400,000. The pressmen made less impression. All the crew were Norwegians and could not, if they would, give the stories which were so eagerly sought.

The evidence given at the subsequent Court of Enquiry—of which Lord Mersey was at the invitation of the Canadian Government a member—was of a highly controversial nature. It appeared that Captain Anderson, of the *Storstad*, was in his cabin during the fog, the bridge being in the charge of Mr. Tuftenes, the first mate. The *Storstad's* case was that the collision was due to the *Empress of Ireland's* change of course during the fog, and that she had not changed course. Charge and counter-charge were brought with increasing vigour, and rarely has an inquiry into a maritime disaster been characterised by such a direct conflict of evidence.

Lord Mersey, however, shewed from the start that he intended the matter to be threshed out to the uttermost detail, whilst at the same time he astonished the Canadians with the rapidity with which he brushed aside irrelevancies.

Evidence was taken from divers to prove how the

sunken liner lay—one of them, Diver Cossaboon, incidentally losing his life through falling from the slimy side of the ship—and intricate details of the ship's construction and steering were gone into.

Eventually the Court found that the *Storstad* was at fault, exonerated Captain Kendall from all blame, and held that Mr. Tuftenes was wrong and negligent in altering his course in a fog, and in failing to call the captain when he saw the fog coming.

The final figures of the lost and saved were: Of a total of 1,477 in the *Empress of Ireland*, 463 were saved, the lost numbering 1,014.

CHAPTER XX

PANIC !

*Peninsula & Oriental Steam Navigation Co.'s Liner
" Egypt "*

7,941 tons gross Register

Built 1897, Greenock

Sunk in Collision

*20 miles from the Armen Lighthouse, Finistere,
France*

7.15 p.m., May 20th, 1922

44 Passengers, 16 Crew lost

An unsatisfactory business, this sinking of the liner *Egypt*. Seamanship was not lacking, nor was vigilance against the enemy fog, but good order and discipline fled in the face of peril. A lascar crew, child-like in its respect for authority well exerted, but also child-like in its incontrollable fears during danger if the guiding hand be absent, failed in its duty and brought death to many of its members and to the passengers in its care.

The *Egypt*, 7,941 tons gross register, Captain Andrew Collyer, belonged to the P. & O. Line. She left Tilbury for Marseilles and Egypt on the afternoon of May 19th, 1922, having on board 71 passengers and a crew of 86 Europeans and 208 lascars and Goanese stewards, the disproportionate numbers between passengers and crew being due to the fact that travellers for the East frequently prefer to go overland to Marseilles and pick up the liners there.

She also carried £1,054,000 in gold and silver bars and coin.

At 6.54 p.m. on the 20th, when in the neighbourhood of the Armen Lighthouse off the coast of Finistère, France, the *Egypt* encountered a fog of sufficient density to warrant her master stopping his engines. At the same time a steamer's syren was faintly heard.

The sound of the strange syren grew louder, but so thick was the fog that the steamer could not be seen, and it was not until she was within a few feet of the liner that she came into view. With terrible suddenness she loomed up out of the fog, going fast at right-angles to the *Egypt*, and only fifteen seconds after she had been seen she crashed into the liner's port side.

The vessel which had struck the *Egypt* was the *Seine*, a French steamer of 1,383 tons gross register on a voyage from La Pallice to Havre. She had been specially designed for work in northern seas and had a reinforced bow for contending with ice. Whilst the damage done to her was, on this account, comparatively slight, the blow she struck the liner was a terrible one, and it was instantly seen in the latter ship that she could not survive.

There is no desire to emphasise unduly the behaviour of the lascars on this sad occasion or to paint in too sombre colours the failure of the Europeans to assert their authority and inculcate courage by their example. But there is no doubt that the non-European members of the crew became panic-stricken and behaved with selfishness and cowardice. Their conduct was the cause of the loss of many passengers' lives and contributed to the loss of many of their own.

Badly holed and taking water at an immense rate, the liner took a severe list to port, her deck

canting at such an angle that the launching of the boats with the most perfect orderliness would have been a difficult and hazardous matter. But in the terror-stricken confusion that reigned it was a nightmare.

Lascars rushed to the falls, eager to get away from the sinking ship, in many cases were so terrified that they let the boats crash down to the water, even entangled themselves in the falls and were crushed between the boats and the ship's side, and when they did get a boat launched, poured into her in such numbers as instantly to imperil their own safety.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate passengers did not know what to do. Afraid that the ship was about to turn turtle and carry down all on her port side, they crowded to starboard and began leaping into the water. The lascars added to their terrors by their screams, and in many cases ran about amongst the passengers, refusing to listen to entreaties for help in launching the boats, and in one or two instances trying to take lifebelts off the women. Those who had not secured boats for themselves leapt down into boats already loaded, overturning one filled mainly with ladies, drowning many of them and themselves.

One boat load of lascars refused to obey the orders of the 3rd engineer, Mr. John Hamilton, to return to the liner's side and pick up people who were struggling in the water and rowed away to the *Seine*. There, however, Mr. Hamilton took charge of one of the French boats and succeeded in picking up about twenty people.

Another boat, getting away with ladies aboard, was lost for a time in the fog, but eventually fell in with a water-logged boat manned by non-Europeans. The latter thereupon tried to rush the safer craft,

and had it not been for the stern conduct of an officer they would have succeeded in their effort. They were kept back and the ladies were saved.

Meanwhile, the *Egypt* was sinking very rapidly. So great was the list that it was no longer possible to attempt to lower boats, and the officers and seamen clambered along the deck, cutting the lashings of the boats, rafts, and deck-fittings that they might float off when the ship sank. Many swimmers were saved through this act, climbing into empty boats when the *Egypt* had finally disappeared, which event took place within twenty minutes of the collision.

But though there was panic, there was also heroism. Mr. G. W. Jenner, the ship's printer, lost his life through an act of gallantry. He had donned a lifebelt and was about to jump from the liner's rail when he observed a woman passenger who had no lifebelt. He promptly gave her his, remarking that though he could not swim, he would take his chance.

Mr. G. V. Brown, the 3rd officer, displayed remarkable coolness. Sent by the master to ascertain conditions in the engine-room, he went down and found it in total darkness. Slipping from the ladder owing to a lurch of the ship, he fell into deep water and was for the moment in danger of drowning inside the ship; but eventually grasping a ladder, he made his way back to the bridge to report that the engine-room was deserted and making water. He then assisted in getting the lascars out of a boat they had seized upon and replacing them with passengers. Many passengers, he said, were even too frightened to get into the boat and had to be pushed in by force.

Mr. Brown jumped into the sea as the *Egypt* went down, and was in the water for an hour and a half

until picked up by a boat, which at first he refused to enter owing to its overloaded state.

An army officer saved the lives of several people by his determined behaviour. Seeing lascars getting away in a boat which was not overloaded whilst there were still several ladies on the deck, he jumped down into the boat and drew an automatic pistol with which he cowed the panic-stricken men. Getting the boat to the side, he shouted for a couple of seamen to come down, and with their help got seventy people including many ladies into the boat. In order to maintain order two or three rounds were fired over the lascars' heads.

From this boat was witnessed the final disappearance of the *Egypt*. As she sank Captain Collyer clambered from the bridge on to the side of the ship, and it was practically from her upturned keel that he was eventually washed into the sea to be picked up by this boat.

The survivors were all taken aboard the *Seine* and conveyed to Brest, the total number lost being 60, of which 44 were passengers.

This unhappy event was the cause of widespread discussion of the question of lascar crews, and in many quarters the opinion was expressed that they were obviously unsatisfactory. But this view was not shared by the Court of Enquiry which investigated the disaster. The Court held that there was no doubt that many of the non-European members of the crew were panic-stricken and shewed a ready desire to save their own lives. But if the European members, said the Court, had shewn more alacrity in going to the boats it is highly probable the non-Europeans would have been kept under effective control and probably assisted in, instead of hindering, the saving of life.

Captain Collyer was held to have at all times

navigated the *Egypt* with proper and seamanlike care, but severe criticism was expressed with regard to his and the Chief Officer's failure to exercise their authority to ensure good order and discipline at the time of the casualty, and in failing to make the crew efficient in collision and boat drill.

The *Egypt* has attracted the attention of salvors on account of the treasure which still lies in her strong-room. But though many projects have been mooted and expeditions have been fitted out for raising this treasure, so far no success has been attained.

The *Egypt* lies in a spot known as the Raz de Sein, where the average depth is sixty fathoms. She was searched for in the summer of 1929 by two Italian salvage vessels, the *Artiglio* and the *Rostro*, and a diver was sent down. This man, Aristide Franchesi, was equipped with special diving apparatus, and though he reached the record depth of seventy-one fathoms he did not find the wreck. The swift tides and treacherous weather of the locality in which the *Egypt* lies must always make salving operations there a task of extraordinary difficulty.

CHAPTER XXI

AN OPEN BOAT EPIC

*Hain Steamship Co.'s Steamer "Trevesa" (formerly
"Imkenturm")*

5,004 tons gross Register

Built 1909, Flensburg, Schleswig

Foundered 2.45 p.m., June 4th, 1923

Indian Ocean

12 lives lost

In 1879 Lieutenant William Bligh and eighteen men, set afloat in an open boat by the mutineers of the *Bounty*, made a voyage of 3,618 miles in forty-one days, and until 1923 no open boat voyage had anywhere approached this in extent. But in that year there was written an epic which with its chapters of drama, tragedy, and heroism once more proved that romance has not deserted the history of the sea, and that men trained in steam lack nothing of seamanship, hardihood, or courage.

The story opened with a paragraph tucked away in the more or less obscure corners of the daily newspapers. It was to the effect that the steamer *Trevesa* had sent out a wireless message stating that she was sinking in rough weather in Lat. 28.42 South, Long. 85.42 East, and that the crew were taking to the boats.

Two days or so later another paragraph appeared. A little more prominence was given to this, and it was headed :

THE LOST *TREVESSA* ALL HOPE NOW GIVEN UP

Three weeks passed. Even those readers who had happened to notice the former news items had probably forgotten the name of the missing steamer when there came a morning on which they were to see it blazoned across three columns with five sub-heads and, below, the most thrilling story the sea has given the present generation.

The *Trevessa* was a steamer of 5,004 tons gross register, belonging to the Hain Steamship Co. Previously she had been the German *Imkenturm*, but, interned during the war, had been purchased by the British company. With a crew of 43 under Captain Cecil Foster she left Fremantle, West Australia, on May 25th, 1923, for England with a cargo of zinc concentrates, a substance resembling in consistency half-set cement through which water does not percolate. The weather she encountered in the Indian Ocean was bad; high seas were running and her decks were constantly swept. At the same time no apprehension on the score of the vessel's safety was felt; she was acknowledged to be a comfortable ship and she behaved well.

She was, however, receiving a terrific hammering. The wind was blowing from the S.S.W. with gale force, and on June 3rd about 10 a.m. a huge sea came aboard amidships on the port side. It tore away the chocks of the two port lifeboats, throwing the latter inboard, breaking in the door of the chief engineer's cabin, and doing other damage. The *Trevessa* was, therefore, hove to so that repairs might be carried out.

It was whilst she was hove to that it first became apparent that all was not well. At midnight the crew reported to Captain Foster that they could hear water in the forehold beneath their feet, and investigation shewed not only that the ship was making water in No. 1 hold, but that the water was

not finding its way into the bilges where the pumps could deal with it. Efforts were made to rectify this, but the ship continued to sink by the head, and all the time mountainous seas were coming aboard.

It was very rapidly clear that the ship was in a dangerous state, and at 1 a.m., on the 4th the situation became so serious that Captain Foster ordered the boats to be prepared and issued lifebelts to the crew.

The S.O.S. was sent out and answered by the *Runic* and two other vessels whose names could not be ascertained. The latter two were between 270 and 350 miles away and replied that they would proceed to the *Trevesa's* assistance; but before further messages could be sent the *Trevesa* had settled so low in the water that her bulwark rail forward was level with the water and abandonment was essential.

This took place at 2.15, the crew leaving in the two starboard lifeboats, Nos. 1 and 3.

The preparations for leaving and the actual departure were operations conducted with great difficulty under severe conditions. Even the provisioning of the boats was dangerous, involving a struggle to the store-rooms forward and the risk of being caught on the exposed deck by seas coming aboard. In addition to stores required by the Board of Trade—1 quart of water and 2 lbs. of biscuit per man—the *Trevesa's* boats were each provided with tins of condensed milk, 5,000 cigarettes, 10 lbs. of tobacco, and several dozen boxes of matches. No. 1 boat, containing 20 men, was commanded by Captain Foster, No. 2, containing 24 men, by Chief Officer J. C. Stewart Smith.

The abandonment had not taken place any too soon. At 2.45 a.m., only half an hour later, the *Trevesa* went down. All the lights had been left burning. As these suddenly disappeared there rose

the cry, "She's gone!" and, as Captain Foster said in his thrilling book describing this great adventure, at these words a cloud of depression settled upon the boat's crews. They felt then the utter loneliness and peril of their situation in their comparatively frail craft, mere specks in the immensity of the ocean.

The spot at which the *Trevesa* foundered is 1,600 miles from Fremantle and 1,728 miles from the Mauritius group, and is remarkable for the fact that there are fewer places in the world so far from land.

All that day, June 4th, the boats remained in the vicinity, awaiting assistance, but on the following day, having seen no sign of ships, the officers decided to make for the Island of Rodriguez, which is 344 miles to the westward of Mauritius. Sail was hoisted, and the great voyage began.

In the meantime two vessels had tried to come to the aid of the company of the *Trevesa*. They were the *Tregenna* and the *Trevean*, both belonging to the Hain Steamship Co. The former was 350 miles, the latter 272 miles, from the *Trevesa* when they received her wireless messages. They proceeded at all possible speed through very heavy seas to the position given, but by the time they had arrived there drift alone would have carried the boats a considerable distance, and they found the sea empty. After two days' search an upturned lifeboat which had broken away from the steamer when she went down was found, a melancholy index to the probable fate of the company of the *Trevesa*. All things considered, it was reluctantly concluded that all hands had been lost, and Perth (W. A.) received the wireless message from the *Trevean*: "Afraid further search useless. Not much hope finding *Trevesa's* boats. Gale blowing." There, but for superb seamanship and heroic endurance, the story of the *Trevesa* would have ended.

The boats had hoisted sail at 5 p.m. on June 4th, and almost immediately their trials began. Hardly an hour had elapsed before the mast of No. 1 boat was carried away. No. 2 boat then tried to tow, but the heavy sea parted the line at 10 p.m., and the boats lay to for the night. Repairs having been effected, the voyage was resumed next day, the boats keeping in touch. No. 1 boat, the captain's, had the larger sail and was accordingly the faster. She kept contact by sailing ahead and waiting or by sailing round the other boat; but progress was slow, and on the 9th the officers decided that they were a hindrance to one another, and that it would be better for the faster boat to go ahead to Rodriguez Island and send back assistance.

Accordingly, the boats parted company at 5 p.m. on the 10th.

Captain Foster had had previous experience of the hardships and perils of an open boat voyage. During the war he had the unenviable experience of being torpedoed twice within 18 hours, and following the second of the enemy's efforts had been nine and a half days in an open boat.

Previous experience combined with knowledge of his remoteness from the land he was trying to make told him what to expect, and he instituted a strict rationing of supplies. Each man was allowed a third of a cigarette-tin of water, a lid of a cigarette-tin full of condensed milk twice a day, and one biscuit. As the store of cigarettes was used up, tins were given out to the men, so that each could mark his own and hand it along to the captain at ration time; it was thus possible for all to see that strict fairness was being maintained.

The men's behaviour was excellent. Captain Foster had nothing but praise for them; with but one marring incident—connected with one man who

drank the alcohol out of the compass—they underwent the monotony and hardships of the voyage with heroic fortitude and, as is usually the case with British seamen, found opportunity for humour and cheeriness.

In Captain Foster's book, *1700 Miles in Open Boats*, to which the present writer is indebted for much of his material, he tells how one M'Geen, composed a ditty which ran :

I like ham and eggs,
I like eggs and bacon.
Anybody here says I don't like 'em,
He's jolly well mistaken.

The men slept as comfortably as they could on lifebelts under the thwarts, and they protected themselves against the night cold with the canvas cover of the lifeboat. There was not much room, and the Indian firemen used to spend the greater part of the time chattering and quarrelling amongst themselves, each probably thinking the other was taking up too much room. Every time their spell of rest was ended one of the seamen used to say to Captain Foster, "Shall I take the cover off the band, sir?"

Mr. Donald Lamont, the wireless operator, improvised some fishing tackle with great labour, but no fish was caught. Captain Foster said there never was the slightest chance of their catching any with that gear, but the making of it and the trying kept their minds occupied.

It is the easiest thing in the world to imagine a voyage such as this as something in the nature of a glorified picnic, and in bringing forward lighter incidents as examples of the fortitude of the sufferers one runs the risk of forgetting that they suffered at all. It cannot, however, be sufficiently emphasised that this voyage of the two boats was a very great trial of the physical and mental qualities of those who

made it. The sea was for the greater part of the time too rough to allow them to stand up in the boats so that they could stretch their limbs and exercise their feet, the latter of which soon became very swollen, and during their spells of rest they could only lie in cramped positions beneath the thwarts. The monotony of the seemingly endless hours depressed their spirits to the lowest until they became callous of danger, ceasing to cry, as warning to the helmsman, "Here comes another!" as waves swept threateningly towards them. The portals of alternate night and day opened and closed, revealing nothing to their eyes save the dome of the sky and the vast waste of waters.

The food, as one can see, was just sufficient to maintain the spark of life; the lack of water was a severe hardship. In addition to the ration a certain amount of rain was caught. In Captain Foster's boat, chutes were improvised out of sheets from the biscuit tins, and when it rained the men allowed the water to run from their hair and beards into the chutes held under the chin and thence into their cigarette-tins. Catching water in the sail was not a success, for often they found that by the time they had lowered the sail and the rain had washed the salt from it, the shower had ceased.

All sorts of methods of making the most of the water, and of assuaging thirst in other ways than drinking, were tried. The biscuit was so dry that at times it was difficult to swallow, and they could not bear to use their minute ration of water to wash it down, preferring to hold the water in their mouths and roll it round for as long as possible before finally swallowing it. The captain was indefatigable in persuading his men to keep from drinking salt water, advising them to try sucking buttons when the desire for water became almost intolerable.

Frequent bathing and sousing the head were also resorted to, though one of the elder seamen refused to bathe, since he said that he doubted if he could resist the temptation to allow the sea water to enter his mouth.

There were two deaths in No. 1 boat, two of the Indian firemen dying from exposure. They were buried at sea.

From the 11th until 2.30 p.m. on the 14th the sea was moderately calm, but then a strong southeasterly wind sprang up, and the boat met with heavy weather for the remainder of the voyage.

Captain Foster had promised a tin of water to the first man to sight anything, and it was at 2.45 p.m. on June 26th that the carpenter first raised the cry of "Land!"

Where? Where? What is it like? Cries from all the others broke out as they roused themselves from their lethargy, and it must have been a very pleasant moment for Captain Foster when he knew that his navigation by the stars and sun alone had brought them out of the middle of the Indian Ocean to the small speck of land he had aimed for.

The land was indeed Rodriguez Island, and at 6 p.m. on the twenty-second day after the foundering of the *Trevessa* the survivors in No. 1 boat saw a light burning in a human habitation. This light came from the verandah of the Eastern Telegraph Co.'s station, and a few minutes later the lights of a ship were seen. This was H.M.C.S. *Secunder*, and as the boat approached she hailed the strange craft making its way in, to receive the reply: "Shipwrecked. Twenty-three days at sea."

With the aid of men from the *Secunder* and native fishermen, the boat was piloted through the reefs and shoals, the fishermen heralding their approach to the jetty so loudly and excitedly that before they arrived

a crowd had formed. The shouts were heard by the Rev. Mr. Silarsah who, finding that it was a boat from the *Trevessa*, immediately sent boys running in all directions for aid. Mr. Hanning, the resident magistrate, and Dr. Mangenie arrived, and immediate preparations were made to do everything possible for the shipwrecked men. The guardroom at the police-station was thrown open to them as temporary headquarters, and food, medicines, hot-water bottles, blankets, and all the comforts the island could command were instantly placed at the disposal of the sufferers. When their immediate wants had been attended to, some of the men were transferred to hospital, and Captain Foster and the other officers became guests in Mr. Hanning's house. Captain Foster mentions in his book the enjoyment of the first cup of tea, the first hot drink they had had for twenty-three days.

And now, what of the other boat? On hearing of the arrival at Rodriguez of Captain Foster, the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, instructed H.M.S. *Colombo* to proceed in search of it.

But No. 3 boat made her own way to land, arriving at Mauritius on June 29th. The miseries of the crew were possibly greater than those of the captain's men. The water supply ran low, and for several days all they had was the rain water they could catch. In spite of warnings, four Indian members of the crew drank sea water, eventually succumbing and being buried at sea. The total casualties in this boat were nine, one of the deaths being due to a most unfortunate accident. Mr. David Mordecai, the second engineer, fell overboard during rough weather and could not be reached in spite of every effort to pick him up. An Indian member of the crew succumbed only two hours before land was reached.

Land was first sighted on June 28th by the

fourth engineer. This was recognised as Mauritius, and the boat was worked round the island at night, whilst the seas could be heard beating on the outer reefs with tremendous noise and force. About 7 a.m. on the following day they found a gap and, making in, were sighted and assisted by native fishermen, who landed them at Bel Ombre.

The survivors were so exhausted that they had to be carried from the shore, and it was some time before they could give any coherent account of the sufferings of the voyage. Treated with every possible kindness, they quickly recovered with but one exception. W. Allchin, the *Trevessa's* chief cook, died shortly after reaching Mauritius. He had had an adventurous career. He was torpedoed three times during the war, had been wounded in the face during a fight with a submarine, and had twice previously been shipwrecked.

Eventually the survivors of the two boats were reunited at Port Louis, Mauritius, where they were given such a rousing reception, and were so lionised with invitations to dinners, dances, and the like, that Captain Foster had at last to cancel all his engagements in order to find time to attend to business matters.

They came home to England in the Union Castle liner *Goorkha*, arriving in the Thames on August 23rd, amidst the boom of all the shipping's syrens and the cheers of the ships' crews. They were welcomed by officials of the Board of Trade, the Imperial Merchant Service Guild, and other bodies, and were given a luncheon at Gravesend.

In recognition of the superb seamanship and fortitude displayed, Captain Foster, Mr. Smith, and Mr. N. V. Robson, the chief engineer, were presented with pieces of plate by the Hain Shipping Co. The Board of Trade also made presentations; Lloyd's

gave their Silver Medal for Saving Life at Sea to the captain and the chief officer, and on January 15th, 1924, the latter two were received by the King and Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Two enquiries into the foundering were held. The Marine Court of Mauritius held the first on July 12th, expressing its admiration of the seamanship and discipline displayed by the master, officers, and crew of the *Trevesa* in their long and arduous boat voyage, and on December 7th the finding of the Board of Trade's enquiry in London was issued. The finding referred to the method of loading zinc concentrates. "It was a method," it said, "which had been in general use for many years, but, however, created a serious danger, in that water entering the holds could not escape into the bilges and could not be pumped out." To this fact the foundering of the *Trevesa* was attributed. The court admitted inability "to find words adequately to express its admiration of the fine seamanship and resolution of the officers, and the splendid discipline and courage of the crew, both European and non-European", and Mr. Aspinall, appearing for the Board of Trade, had said at the conclusion of the captain's evidence: "It is for the court and not for me to praise you, but the Board of Trade instruct me to express wonder at the achievement you have accomplished."

Boat No 1 was purchased by Anglo-Ceylon Estates Ltd., of Mauritius, and having been sent to London was placed on exhibition, thousands of people having thus the opportunity of seeing for themselves the boat in which one of the most remarkable voyages in the history of the world had been made.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE *ANTINOE*

New Egypt and Levant Shipping Co.'s Freighter
3,748 tons gross Register
Built 1902, Sunderland
Abandoned North Atlantic
1.30 a.m., January 28th, 1926

It is the custom nowadays to deplore the passing of sail, and rightly may one regret that year by year the sea loses more and more of the most beautiful of her ships; but the voicing of regret often carries with it the implications that seamen and seamanship are not what they were, and that steam cannot breed the type of men that followed the sea before Patrick Miller and Fulton clapped engines into hulks and broke the rule of "the princes amongst the powers of the sea".

This must not be accepted. Sail had not prerogatives of skill and chivalry; the sea exacts from its servants valour, toil, and self-sacrifice to-day, as it ever has, and as it ever will, even when steam belongs to "the good old days" and a new race of mariner with new forces at its command looks back at the "spacious and valiant days" of the twentieth century.

Let the sceptic read the story of the saving of the crew of the *Antinoe*, a story magisterically referred to as "one of the great epics of the sea", and say if any other race or time has produced a nobler.

The *Antinoe*, Captain Harry Tose, was a freighter of 3,748 tons gross register. She belonged to the New Egypt and Levant Shipping Co., and with a crew of twenty-five left New York on January 14th, 1926, loaded with grain. All went well until January 22nd. On that day a south-westerly gale sprang up, which, increasing every hour, became eventually a hurricane so violent that Captain Tose could describe it as the worst he had ever experienced in the course of his seafaring career. There was, however, no outstanding danger, and the *Antinoe*, though very severely buffeted, kept to her course.

But at 6.20 a.m. on Saturday, the 23rd, when Mr. John Price, the second officer, was in charge of the ship a dramatic event occurred. There rose up out of the sea a great wave not following the ordinary run of its fellows, and it struck the *Antinoe* amidships, falling upon her with terrific force as if the sea in its wrath were attempting to crush her at a blow.

This phenomenon of solitary waves of extreme size and power is not unique in sea history. In 1928 the *Leviathan* was struck by a wave 130 feet above water-line, considerable damage being done. Sir James Douglas, the lighthouse engineer, once took accurate observation of a wave that threw gravel from the sea bed on to the platform of the lighthouse on Bishop Rock, Scilly. The platform is 120 feet above normal sea-level, and the sea at that point is 150 feet deep.

In descriptions of the size of waves exaggeration may enter, but their force is frequently not fully realised. At Peterhead blocks of wall weighing 41 tons each have been thrown out of position, though no less than 37 feet below low-tide mark, and in the same section of blockwork a portion weighing 3,300 ton was once shifted two inches without being



THE ANTINE AS SEEN FROM THE DECK OF THE PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

broken. Whilst the breakwater at Colombo was being built, a length of wall, 150 feet long by 28 feet wide, on a foundation 20 feet below low-water level, was thrown back 15 inches by a single wave.

The wave that struck the *Antinoe* was not, perhaps, possessed of such power as these, but the damage it did was enormous. It carried away a lifeboat, smashed a tank on the starboard side of the deck, broke the saloon door and washed away the wooden bulkhead round the lower bridge, and shifted a large ice-chest, flinging it against the steering gear and bending one of the connecting rods.

This last was a serious business. When Captain Tose had come on deck and given orders for the débris to be cleared away, it was found that the steering gear was seriously affected.

Grave as the situation had thus been suddenly made by the action of one wave, a greater peril immediately afterwards threatened the ship. She took a sudden list to starboard. The cargo had shifted.

The list became worse, increasing gradually minute by minute as successive waves struck the ship. These pounded her unmercifully and began to tear at the hatch coverings, ripping the tarpaulins and washing out the wedges. The crew were set to work to maintain the hatches at all costs, and their great fight for life against the sea began.

As yet there was no thought of calling for help. Discipline in the *Antinoe* was splendid, and every effort was made to carry on without outside assistance. But the weather shewed no signs of moderating; the fury of the wind increased; sea after sea swept the decks, broke in cabin doors, flooded the men's quarters, and carried away the boats. The list continued to get worse, and shortly after 3 a.m. on Sunday, the 24th, the situation became so perilous

that Captain Tose instructed the wireless operator, Mr. Evans, to send out the S.O.S.

This was picked up by Newfoundland and re-broadcast, being heard by the *Aquitania*, of the Cunard Line, and the *President Roosevelt*, Captain Fried, belonging to the United States Shipping Board. The latter vessel, being the nearer of the two, proceeded to the position given by the *Antinoe*—Lat. 47.50 north Long. 36.05 west—and about noon was alongside.

Arrived there, Captain Fried wirelessly to the *Antinoe* asking if Captain Tose wished to abandon his ship. The reply was "No," and the *President Roosevelt* therefore stood by. Violent squalls were blowing, snow was falling, and high seas were pounding at the liner as she took up station about a quarter of a mile to windward and began to pump oil on the water. Although the oil, as Captain Tose claimed, saved the *Antinoe* from sinking, it did not calm the sea sufficiently to allow a boat to be launched, but Captain Fried determined to stand by and not forsake the battered freighter, in spite of his timetable and the great number of passengers he carried.

At 9 p.m. an incident occurred that but for fine seamanship might have resulted in the loss of the whole company of the *Antinoe*. At that hour the *President Roosevelt* lost sight of the other vessel, and it was not until 3.40 p.m. on the following day that she was again sighted firing rockets and burning flares.

The finding of the *Antinoe* on this occasion was due to a remarkable piece of seamanship on the part of Captain Fried. By calculating from dead reckoning from the recorded positions of the two vessels when alongside, and allowing for drift, the probable position of the *Antinoe* was worked out, and forty minutes after the calculation was complete the ship was rediscovered.

In the meantime she had suffered terribly. A large derrick which was lashed forward to a stanchion had broken adrift and had added to the straining of the deck. At 8 p.m. on the same day salt water had got into the batteries of the wireless installation and no further wireless messages could be sent. Had the sea put forth its full strength against the ship then she must have gone down and taken all aboard her ; but it seemed that the sea which " plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death " was deliberately prolonging the agony of the men of the *Antinoe*, determined, one might say, to let them fight and hope before finally slaying them.

At 4 p.m. on Sunday, the 24th, the bunker hatch had been stove in, letting water into the stokehold, and at 2.30 a.m. on Monday the main engine stopped. Without her engines to keep her head on to the sea the *Antinoe* was in a desperate situation. The gale still blew without respite, seas swept the ship continually, got into the stores and destroyed them, robbing the crew of food and water and keeping them working without rest at the hatches. Everything the men did was at risk of their lives, as tons of water constantly swept the decks. They were fighting now to keep the ship afloat at all costs. Had she foundered, they would have been instantly drowned. Even if any of her boats had remained, not one could have been got away to live in such a sea as was running. Their only chance of life now lay with the *President Roosevelt*, and on her return Captain Tose signalled that he wished to abandon his ship. Nothing could save her ; the crew could not maintain their struggle indefinitely. Physical endurance was reaching its limit, and Captain Tose knew that catastrophe would follow very shortly the first slackening of effort.

The weather had moderated slightly. This, however, was a matter of comparison ; it was still

extremely violent, and great seas were still running. The *Antinoe's* situation was recognised as desperate; Captain Tose had signalled that he did not think they could hold out much longer, and an attempt was made by Chief Officer Miller and a volunteer crew of the *President Roosevelt* to take a boat across.

Unhappily this attempt met with disaster. The moment the boat was launched a heavy sea struck the liner, smashing the boat against her side and spilling all the men out. The oil which had helped the *Antinoe* was now the cause of tragedy; it got into the men's eyes and clung to their clothing, seriously hampering their movements as they struggled for life, and two of them failed to secure life-lines thrown to them and were lost. One drifted away, to be lost sight of almost immediately; the other, clinging to the lifeboat, was carried past the *Antinoe*. There his plight was seen, and a gallant attempt to save him was made by Able-seaman Shipley, who threw him a rope's end from the bows as he drifted past. This just failed to reach him, and he was swept away to his death in spite of the *President Roosevelt's* efforts to find him.

All day on the 26th efforts to establish communication were made. The *Antinoe's* condition became worse every hour. She reported eight feet of water in the stokehold, the sea was ripping the tarpaulin covers off the hatches, and at nightfall the starboard side was practically submerged. At 6 p.m. the pumps gave out, and from that time on the crew could do nothing to keep the water down.

On the 27th the struggle to save life was continued. Attempts were made to float a boat down from the *President Roosevelt*, but none met with success, the boats being continually upset or smashed, no less than six in all of the *President Roosevelt's* equipment being destroyed in one way or another.

Her Lyle gun was then called into commission in attempts to fire a line over the *Antinoe*. This gun was fired sixteen times, but frequently the line carried away close to the projectile.

On one occasion, however, a line was got inboard the *Antinoe* and a heavier rope hauled across. It was now thought that communication was definitely established, but the rope was cut on the *Antinoe's* rail, and the boat which was being sent down to her was lost.

Signals between the vessels were being made by Morse blinker, and by this means a continual conversation was maintained. "We are doing everything we can," said the *President Roosevelt*, "but it is impossible to send a boat in this sea." "We know, and are very grateful," was the answer. Again: "Can you keep afloat till weather moderates?" and "The captain says it is very doubtful," replied the *Antinoe*.

Towards evening slight but none the less appreciable improvement in the weather was noticeable, and it was decided to try and send a manned boat across. "We are getting a boat ready now," signalled the liner. "Have heaving lines ready." And a little later: "When we sound the whistle, have your men on the forecastle to get our boat alongside and get in quickly."

At 7.20 the boat left the liner's side, and anxious eyes from both ships watched her progress as she fought her way across, now to be tossed on a breaker's crest and now to be swept down the long green slopes into the trough. But the greatest danger was to be faced when she came alongside. Several oars were broken in fending her off from the wallowing steamer and once or twice it was touch and go whether she would be upset.

The men o the *Antinoe*, however, were smart. Discipline had been excellently maintained ; Captain Tose had arranged the order in which his crew should be rescued, sending the married men first ; and as the *President Roosevelt's* boat at last came in close enough ten men leapt into the water and were quickly snatched up. These were taken safely across to the liner and got aboard, but the boat was damaged and had to be cut adrift.

At midnight the weather was found to have improved still more, and as there was a bright moon it was decided that the opportunity should not be missed. Mr. Miller again took a boat over ; the attempt was completely successful, and the remainder of the company of the *Antinoe* was taken off without loss, Captain Tose being the last to leave.

The rescued crew were in a sad plight. They had been working without respite for nearly four days, and had been without food and water for two. Their clothing was in ribbons, all were suffering from exposure and several from injuries. Captain Tose was so weak that he had to be carried aboard the liner, but despite his physical condition insisted upon being taken to the bridge to express his gratitude to Captain Fried for his rescue.

At 1.35 a.m. the liner proceeded on her way. The *Antinoe* was still afloat, but as she was never sighted again it is obvious that her lonely end came very shortly after the abandonment.

The *President Roosevelt* had stood by for 3 days and 22 hours, during which time she had drifted 108 miles. Her crew were exhausted by their long vigil and their constant exertions, and Captain Fried had been on the bridge for 84 hours without a break, one of his great anxieties being the possibility of collision between the two ships.

The passengers, too, had not had a very comfortable time, but had borne the delay and constant tossing in the storm with cheerfulness, knowing that without the liner the men of the *Antinoe* must perish. There were, however, two exceptions, and one passenger sent a written protest to Captain Fried at the delay. No doubt to him "time was money", and the incident can be left at that.

On January 31st the *President Roosevelt* arrived at Plymouth, whither the fame of her heroic adventure had, thanks to wireless, gone before. By direction of the First Lord of the Admiralty an officer from the Plymouth Command went aboard before she docked to convey the Admiralty's congratulations to Captain Fried on "the magnificent seamanship which made the rescue possible". In the meantime, His Majesty the King had sent a message to President Coolidge, expressing his thanks and his admiration of the splendid example of skill and gallantry displayed by Captain Fried and his men. And before the *President Roosevelt* turned round for the voyage to New York an informal gathering was held aboard, during which the Mayor and ex-Mayor of Plymouth and the President of the Chamber of Commerce conveyed to the captain their appreciation of his gallantry. Captain Tose also handed to Captain Fried and Mr. Miller letters in which he expressed his heartfelt gratitude at the rescue.

The Court of Enquiry, which was opened on March 22nd, found that the disaster was attributable "to the entry of water into the hold and stokehold under very exceptional weather conditions which gradually increased the slight list originally caused by the shifting of the cargo". No blame was attached to any of the parties concerned, and the *Antinoe* was found to have been abandoned in circumstances of

great urgency and difficulty, and not prematurely. The Court expressed its deep appreciation of the efforts of the captain and crew of the *President Roosevelt*, and of the courage and discipline of all aboard the *Antinoe*.

CHAPTER XXIII

ACCIDENT AND AFTERMATH

Liner "Principessa Mafalda," belonging to Navigazione Générale Italiana

9,210 tons gross Register

Built 1908, Genoa

Sunk after accident 9.40 p.m., Oct. 25th, 1927

Off Abrolhos Island, Brazil

9 Officers, 37 Seamen, 268 Passengers lost

The affair of the *Principessa Mafalda* is another example of the evils of panic during disaster at sea. In many cases panic has increased an inevitable death-roll; in this it was almost the sole cause of the loss of life. Had the passengers kept their heads, all would probably have been saved.

On October 26th, 1927, the world became aware that the Italian liner *Principessa Mafalda*, Captain Simone Guli, belonging to Navigazione Générale Italiana, had met with a mishap off the coast of Brazil. For some time there was considerable conflict of reports both with regard to what had actually happened to the ship and to the number of lives lost. At 8 a.m. on the 26th the death-roll was stated to be 700, at 9 it was 880, at 5 p.m. it was 156, and later, between reports that all had been saved, it was set at 34. At the same time, the disaster was attributed to striking a rock, to grounding on Abrolhos Island, and to a boiler explosion.

None of these reports was correct, the confusion with regard to the number of survivors probably arising from the fact that many passengers saved were transferred from one rescuing ship to another, each of which wirelessly the number aboard at different times. As an example of the incorrectness of the rumours there was the case of the French steamer *Mosella*. She was reported to have 300 survivors aboard, but the actual number she landed at Bahia on the 27th was 80. Her master, Captain Privat, was one of the first to dispel the cloud of false optimism which was blinding people on land to the truth, saying that they must be prepared for a heavy death-roll.

The *Principessa Mafalda* was on a voyage from Genoa to Buenos Aires and South American ports, having a crew of 288 and 971 passengers, who were mostly Italians, Argentines, Brazilians, and Syrians. She left the Cape Verde Islands on October 18th for Rio de Janeiro, where she was due on the 26th. The voyage had been uneventful. A certain amount of bad weather had been experienced, but it was nothing alarming, and on the afternoon of the 25th the passengers were all in excellent spirits, looking forward to their journey's end, and at the same time enjoying a pleasant day with music and dancing on the decks.

At 5.10 p.m. she was passed quite closely by the Blue Star cargo ship *Empirestar*, Captain C. R. Cooper, the crew of which were close witnesses of all that occurred. There appeared to be nothing wrong with the Italian vessel, though it was noticed that she was going slowly. But within a few minutes events began to happen with alarming rapidity. At 5.20 the *Principessa Mafalda* sent out an S.O.S., signalled: "Danger to engines", hauled up her ensign, and blew a blast on her whistle. The *Empire-*

star immediately turned back and closed on her. At 5.45 the latter ship stopped and began to lower crowded boats.

It was obvious that something of an extraordinary character had happened in the liner, and the company of the *Empirestar*, whilst getting their own boats away as quickly as possible, witnessed the sudden rush of tragedy upon the scene. Passengers in the distressed ship could be seen crowding the rails gesticulating wildly, and apparently gripped by panic. The boats were rushed, and were so overcrowded that two of them immediately capsized on reaching the water, whilst many passengers could be seen throwing themselves into the sea.

The *Empirestar's* boats were soon at work picking up people from the water, and whilst thus engaged were joined by boats from other vessels which, summoned by the S.O.S., had arrived on the scene.

In all eight vessels arrived. They were the *Empirestar*, 7,199 tons, the French *Formose* and *Mosella*, of 9,975 and 10,123 tons respectively, the British *King Frederick* and *Rossetti*, of 5,106 and 6,540 tons respectively, the German *Albena*, of 4,930 tons, and the Blue Star liner *Avelona*, of 1,300 tons.

The rescuers were able to approach close to the *Principessa Mafalda*, and could see that absolute panic raged in some parts of the ship. The passengers were shrieking and rushing about, and men were seen tearing the women out of the boats. The captain, officers, and seamen, however, were doing their utmost to restore order, some of the officers having revolvers in their hands, and with threatening gestures trying to hold back the rushes. The whole crew from the master downwards behaved with calmness and great gallantry, but in face of the insanity of fear they were powerless.

The work of rescue proceeded after night had

fallen, and by the light of lanterns and torches scores of swimmers, many of whom were in danger of being cut up by the rescuing ship's propellers, were picked up, and rescues made of women and children clinging to wreckage.

The boats of the *Empirestar* were commanded by the chief officer, Mr. N. J. Synott, who gave one of the most detailed accounts of the whole occurrence.

Just after 9 p.m., he said, the *Principessa Mafalda* could be seen settling down fairly rapidly by the stern and listing heavily to port. He was quite close in, picking up survivors, and about 9.15 heard a noise as if heavy weights were giving way inside the liner, and at 9.40 she suddenly capsized and sank. So sudden was the final catastrophe that one of the *Empirestar's* boats was nearly caught. As the liner turned over Mr. Synott shouted to his men: "Pull for your lives!" and so desperate was the situation that in their efforts to get away the seamen broke two oars, and had they not had others would undoubtedly have been dragged under by the suction of the sinking ship.

The final scenes were harrowing in the extreme. Shortly before the ship heeled over the *Empirestar's* men had shouted to passengers to jump into the sea and be picked up; but they had appeared to be absolutely dazed with terror. They clung desperately to the tilting rail on the liner's side, shouting and screaming, and so were taken to their deaths. The sea was crowded with floating wreckage and bodies; amidst the hails of boat calling to boat rose the agonising cries of the drowning, and above these sounds the roar of steam escaping from the doomed liner. "Then as the liner went down," said Mr. Synott, "there was one big, long wail which seemed to come from the women and children, with terrible screams and shouting."

For hours after the sinking boats from all the assembled ships carried on, hunting amidst the wreckage for survivors. They drew in with boat-hooks all they could reach, and any shewing signs of life were taken up. One man at least owed his life to a groan. Taken up by men of the *Empirestar*, he was thought to be dead, but gave a groan just as he was being recommitted to the sea. Artificial respiration was immediately tried, and he survived.

The *Empirestar* rescued 201 persons, and very gallant work was carried out by the *Rossetti*, which is reported to have actually tried to tie up alongside the sinking liner. The total number of the saved was 945, making a death-roll of 314, which included Captain Guli, who was seen clinging to the bridge to the last, and 8 other officers. The rescued were put ashore at Pernambuco, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro.

The loss of so many officers probably accounted for the confusion of reports which was a feature of this disaster. First accounts came from the passengers, few of whom were in a state to give coherent or knowledgeable versions of what had happened. Eventually, clearer accounts shewed that the *Principessa Mafalda* had not run aground on Abrolhos Island or any sunken reef, nor had her boilers burst. The disaster took place about ninety miles from the island and was due to a fractured propeller shaft.

The passengers were all enjoying calm sea and fair weather when a shock was felt in greater or less degree in all parts of the ship. Some heard the roar of steam and the sound of rushing water; others felt merely a slight jar. All, however, were reassured by Captain Guli, who said that there had been slight damage in the engine-room and that it would be put right in a few minutes. Later he said that the vessel would have to be stopped for a time.

No fear was so far displayed by the passengers, who had so little inkling of the true state of affairs that they resumed their dancing. But gradually news crept round that things were more serious than at first appeared. It was whispered that the damage was irreparable, and suddenly it was noticed that the ship was getting lower in the water.

At this, mass-fear appears instantaneously to have seized a considerable section of the passengers, who imparted it to the rest. They rushed to the sides and the trouble began.

As the list and the roar of intrushing water increased the passengers got quite out of hand. There were frantic scenes; in spite of all their efforts the crew could do nothing to control them, and even as they tried to give out the lifebelts in an orderly fashion they were swept off their feet and overwhelmed. The boats were rushed, and men and women began to throw themselves madly into the water. In actual fact the liner took four hours and twenty minutes to sink, and without untoward incident every man, woman, and child in her could have been saved. Captain Guli had not been unduly optimistic when he had wirelessly in the early stages that he hoped to save all.

An enquiry into this disaster was held in Rome, the result being published on February 22nd, 1928. The court found that the cause of the disaster was a fracture in the drive to the port propeller shaft. In breaking, the shaft had dealt the vessel's side a tremendous blow, tearing a hole through which water entered at the rate of seventeen tons a minute. Unfortunately, the water-tight doors could not be closed, whilst the pumps were, for some reason, not properly operated. It was found that the *Principessa Mafalda* was amply supplied with lifebelts and boats, but instructions how to put on the belts and

how to proceed to boat stations had not been given to the passengers. The loss of life was chiefly attributed to the great panic amongst the passengers, especially amongst a hundred and ten Syrians.

The *Principessa Mafalda* sank in about twenty fathoms, and on clear, calm days parts of her hull could be seen from the surface. On November 17th the captain of the American steamer *St. Anthony* reported that he had seen the sunken liner and considered her a serious menace to navigation.

In the following February the rescue work done by the men of the *Rossetti* was handsomely recognised. Acting on behalf of the Italian Chamber of Commerce at Sao Paulo, the British Consul there handed to the master, Captain Denson, a gold medal, and gave £200 for distribution amongst the crew in appreciation of their gallantry on the occasion of this great sea disaster.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FOUNDERING OF THE *VESTRIS*

*Steamer belonging to the Liverpool Brazil & River
Plate Steam Navigation Co., Ltd. (Lamport &
Holt)*

10,494 tons gross Register

Built 1912, Belfast

Foundered in West Atlantic

2.30 p.m., Nov. 12th, 1928

69 Passengers, 46 Crew lost

The narrator of the story of the foundering of the *Vestris* navigates in difficult waters. It is not plane sailing. Things happened that should not have happened, orders were given that should not have been given, and over the whole hangs the shadow of human fault.

Perhaps the full story will never be told. Of those who were present some do not wish to speak, others cannot, having paid for whatever errors they committed with their lives, and that we have not had a plain unvarnished tale of all that happened in the ill-fated *Vestris* is proved by a significant paragraph in the finding of the British Court of Enquiry. It runs: "Speaking generally, the evidence is unsatisfactory, contradictory, inconsistent, and piecemeal. Much of it is unreliable, some of it untruthful."

However, it is no part of the present writer's purpose to deal with these matters; he is concerned with wind and wave and high endeavour, and for

those who happen to be concerned with the dry land side of the story of the *Vestris*, and the faults of commission and omission that attended on the disaster, there are the law reports of the case. They alone would nearly fill a volume of the size of the present.

The *Vestris* was a vessel of 10,494 tons gross register. She belonged to the Liverpool Brazil & River Plate Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., was managed by Messrs. Sanderson & Sons Inc., of New York, who acted as agents for Messrs. Lamport & Holt, stockholders of the first-named company, and was commanded by Captain William J. Carey. At 3.45 p.m. on November 10th, 1928, she left Hoboken for Barbados and South American ports with a large cargo, 129 passengers, and a crew of 197 all told. At 2.30 p.m. on the 12th she foundered with a loss of 115 lives.

The voyage was uncomfortable from the start. On the morning after sailing a list was noticed, and this gradually increased during the day. The wind also freshened, and by the afternoon of Sunday, November 11th, waves were sweeping the vessel freely.

At the same time it was observed that the *Vestris* was making water. The port half-door and one or two ports were leaking, and later water came in through the starboard half-door. Comparatively serious as this was, it did not account for the amount of water which the *Vestris* was taking, and for some considerable time the master appears to have been puzzled. An officer detailed to investigate the holds could hear no sound of water there, though it was clear that the sea was getting in from some source or another.

The engine-room staff, however, was aware of one source at all events. As they testified later, the flow of water was continuous ; so much so that on Sunday

evening the bilges were half full, and pumping did not reduce the amount. Water was coming in through the starboard ash-ejector, and when the *Vestris* rolled to starboard a column of water ten or twelve feet high was thrown up through the pipe.

At 4 p.m. things began to look very serious, and about 7.15 an incident happened which to all intents and purposes sealed the fate of this unhappy ship.

At that time the *Vestris* was struck by a wave of exceptional size. According to Mr. H. G. Welland, the third officer, "it loomed up on the port bow, struck the ship, and flooded the boat deck". Two boats were knocked out of their chocks, the rails on the lee side were smashed and carried away by the weight of water, and three motor-cars, carried in No. 1 shelter deck, broke away and smashed through the bulkhead into the men's quarters. Under the blow the *Vestris* lurched to starboard and never came back to an upright position. As a survivor said, everything got worse after that.

The shock was felt in every part of the ship. Seamen and passengers were thrown off their feet, chairs in the saloon were torn from their bolts, crockery and furniture were smashed; in fact, so severe was the shock that many of the seamen below decks thought there had been a collision.

In the early hours of the following morning the condition of the ship was very bad; she was practically lying along, and her master would have been absolutely justified in sending out the S.O.S. That he did not do so is proved by subsequent events to be blameworthy; but it is natural for a ship's master, for several reasons, to endeavour to help himself as much as and for as long as possible. If he can make port and fight his way unaided out of difficulty, his credit is considerably enhanced; whilst, on the other hand, a master who calls in outside help, when there

may be later the slightest suggestion from any quarter that he need not have done so, is liable to be hauled over the coals by his owners.

But whatever the master may have thought of affairs, the state of the ship was obvious to the passengers. Survivors said that at that time they doubted if the *Vestris* could survive another roll, and many made preparations for the worst, putting on warm clothing and securing their valuables. The knowledge that the passengers were in this frame of mind, combined with his own knowledge of the precarious condition of the ship, might have influenced some masters; but for reasons of his own Captain Carey still delayed decisive measures, appearing to think even at this point that the water might be kept under and the ship righted.

Every effort was, indeed, being made to combat the water in the ship, and in this respect the chief engineer and his staff were worthy of praise. Mr. James Adams, the chief engineer, in a final endeavour to fight the water, conceived the idea of adapting an ash-ejector so that it could be used for pumping water. This work was carried out by Mr. George Prestwick, the fourth engineer, who for two hours was sitting working up to his neck in water. Once he was thrown right under by a lurch of the ship, and a donkeyman pulled him out by the hair.

This adaption worked, and it kept the water down for a time. But, unfortunately, there were other considerations. About 10 o'clock on Monday morning some of the coloured firemen left the stokehold. They were working there under very severe conditions, having to hold on to chains while they fired, and undoubtedly felt that the ship might turn over and go down with them at any moment. However, ordered back to their posts, they returned and for a time worked well. But at 11 all save three

finally deserted the stokehold, and the engineers themselves had to help fire the furnaces. This they continued to do until some time after noon, when they found it impossible to carry on.

In the meantime, Captain Carey had at last realised that he was fighting against impossible odds. At 9.56 a.m. on Monday he sent out the S.O.S., and at 11 ordered the boats to be got out.

Both these measures had been delayed too long, and yet further delay took place in the matter of launching the boats. The *Vestris* was listing severely to starboard, and it was considered better to get out the port boats. This work was exceedingly difficult, as the boats fouled the ship's side as they went down, their overlapping planks continually catching in the ship's plates, and the passengers had to slide down the side in order to get into them. The women were found, not unnaturally, very reluctant to make this perilous journey down the sloping side, though the stewards and others did valiant work in converting themselves into "toboggans" and, thus loaded, sliding down with their human freight to the boats. Children were lowered in blankets.

Unhappily, these efforts were not productive of great result. Of the 37 women aboard only 8 were saved, and of the 12 children none. This was strongly commented on when the story of the disaster became known to the world, but it eventually became accepted that the conditions were such that only the strongest stood a chance of surviving.

It was apparently the view of the master and other officers that the starboard boats could not be filled owing to the list causing them to swing too far out from the ship's side; but this view was not upheld by the court, it being maintained that passengers could have been got into them by means of the davits and falls. Apparently the officers did eventually

make up their minds that the starboard boats could be used, for these boats were being cut free when the ship sank.

There were, unfortunately, no would-be rescuers yet on the scene. The wireless message for assistance had been picked up by the Radio Corporation of America and a number of ships. The liner's agents being informed, they communicated with the Navy Department, who sent two cutters from Norfolk, Virginia, whilst the *San Juan*, 3,512 tons, the *American Shipper*, 7,430 tons, the *Miriam*, 1,237 tons, the *Berlin*, 15,286 tons, and the U.S. battleship *Wyoming* proceeded to the position given.

This position was, for some undiscoverable reason, wrong. It was Lat. 37.35 North, Long. 71.8 West. At 5.45 p.m. the *San Juan* wirelessly that she had arrived at that position, but could see no signs of the *Vestris*, boats, or wreckage, and it was not until 3.30 a.m. on the Tuesday that the *American Shipper* wirelessly from Lat. 37.19 North, Long. 70.38 West: "Now on scene, one lifeboat alongside us." An hour later another message came from the *Miriam* saying that she had picked up a boat and urging the others to hurry to the scene.

Eventually eight boats containing 202 survivors were picked up by the *American Shipper*, the *Miriam*, and the *Berlin*, whilst 9 persons were taken from wreckage by *Wyoming*. All the survivors had dramatic stories to tell, and happily most of them spoke of great heroism.

Mr. Leslie Watson, the second officer, was with Captain Carey to the end. The *Vestris*, he said, at the last turned right up till her bilge keel came clean out of the water. He and the captain were thrown into the sea clinging to one another. He went down head first, got clear of some ropes, and came up supported by his lifebelt, but did not see the master

again. In the water he found a lady passenger, and together they got hold of some wreckage, being eventually picked up by one of the boats found by the *Miriam* at 4.30 on Tuesday.

Captain Carey was not wearing a lifebelt. There had been plenty handy, but apparently he had not bothered, or possibly he had purposely taken his chance without. His load of anxiety must have been tremendous, and what was passing in his mind is evidenced by his last words: "My God, my God, I am not to blame for this."

The third officer, Mr. Welland, was thrown into the sea when the ship sank, but managed to secure hold of a floating locker and was in the water about an hour before being taken into No. 5 boat, which was found by the *American Shipper*.

George Amsdell, storekeeper of the *Vestris*, told one of the most tragic stories of the wreck. He was in charge of No. 6 boat, and got several children and between twenty-five and thirty women into it. But when within five feet of the water the falls jammed and it would not lower any more. He secured a knife, shouted to the passengers to hold on, and cut away the aft fall. The forward fall was at the same time either cut or released, and the boat dropped neatly into the water. All might have been saved but for a tragic act of fate. They were just shoving off when a davit, breaking away from the ship, fell down upon them. It crushed many of the passengers instantly and sank the boat. Amsdell suffered a broken arm and an injured head, but came to the surface and was thrown by a wave high on to the ship's side. He thought she would go down at any minute and ran aft, leaping from her stern into the sea, where with several others he supported himself on wreckage. No. 14 boat tried to reach them, but was handicapped by floating wreckage and the

fact that she had only one oar. Eventually Amsdell was picked up by No. 5 boat. This contained 6 or 7, but cruising round, it took in about 30 who were subsequently rescued.

Several of the other boats met with mishaps in one form or another. No. 14, which had only one oar, had rolled into the water, losing all her gear, and No. 8 was damaged during lowering, got clear, but was soon swamped.

It was stated that boats manned by certain coloured members of the crew stood off and refused to assist the drowning; but against this must be set the bravery of others.

James Boxhill, a native of Barbados, a fireman, proved himself not only a brave man, but of exceptional physique. He was helping to launch No. 4 boat when the *Vestris* sank. The boat never got clear of the falls, and was taken down by the ship. Boxhill swam to some wreckage, eventually losing consciousness, and in this state was picked up by the battleship at 9.30 on Tuesday morning, having been helpless in the water for nineteen hours. He survived, and was one of the witnesses at the British Court of Inquiry. He stated that whilst he was clinging to the wreckage a boat's crew saw him. But, he said, it was right of that boat not to come to him, as there was a great deal of wreckage about, and the boat was already overloaded. He was the last fireman to leave the stokehold, and when this fact was mentioned to him in court he caused laughter by saying, "You bet your life I was."


Quarter-master Lionel Licorice, a West Indian negro, climbed into an empty lifeboat when the ship went down, but finding no oars in her, went overboard and retrieved a pair. With the aid of other seamen he saved about twenty people.

There were three enquiries into this affair, two in

the United States, one in England, the finding of the latter, the Board of Trade's tribunal, being delivered on July 31st, 1929.

The latter forms a lengthy document, and deals with every known detail throughout the occurrence. Chief amongst the points dealt with were the way in which the *Vestris* was loaded at Hoboken and the delay in sending out the S.O.S. This, it was stated, should have been sent out not later than 4 a.m. on the Monday, no less than six hours before it was actually sent out. Had the appeal for assistance been heard earlier, the rescuing ships would have had daylight in which to search for the *Vestris*, and the loss of life must have been less.

Additional poignancy is given to this unhappy business by the fact that on the fateful Sunday, when the *Vestris* was fighting her last battle with the seas, a ship named *Montrose* was riding out the storm within six miles, but, having no wireless, knew nothing of what was happening. On Monday, when the S.O.S. was being sent out, the *Montrose* was forty-five miles away and could have reached the sinking ship in a few hours, and later she actually sighted the *Giorgio Ohlsen* looking for the *Vestris*. But she did not know anything of the disaster until she reached Boston some days later.



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